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OUR SHORT STORY

MORRISON'S MIRROR

BY CHARLES LANDE

PART I.

To begin at the beginning ; to go back to the date of my first acquaintance with the mirror is to return in memory to the afternoon of a miserable January day. It had rained since early morning—a fine, close rain which seemed to have a subtle way of making everyone uncomfortable. Fleet Street ran with liquid mud, which the omnibuses, as they passed, splashed liberally across the pavements ; a thin grey mist hung like a pall above the dripping houses. My chambers, in Middle Temple Lane, held out to me a vista of dry comfort as I made my way through the umbrella-laden throng down Fleet Street on that depressing afternoon.

I was turning into the Temple, when someone hailed me loudly from the direction of the Strand. I stopped, and with surprise recognised Morrison.

He came bearing down on me with long swinging strides, tall and spare, his head very much forward in a sort of craning attitude peculiar to him. As usual, he had neither coat nor umbrella, though it was raining, and I noticed that he carried a brown paper parcel under his arm. My acquaintance with Morrison has always been of a spasmodic character. He was a very extraordinary man. At the time of his call to the Bar, a great future was predicted for him ; the grasp and subtlety of his mind were quite wonderful, and, combined with more solid qualities, must soon have placed him in the front rank. But he proved a failure of the completest kind. The drudgery and idle life in chambers soon sickened him of the profession. He spent most of his time at the British Museum developing a craze for research into the wonders and mysteries of the past. About that time he wrote an article on some very abstruse subject—I read it with little understanding—which created something of a sensation among a few savants ; and then he disappeared altogether from London, and years passed without a word or sign. Now we met as though we had seen each other the day before. Morrison did not even go through the formality of shaking hands ; he merely slipped his arm through mine and we took up our friendship where we had broken it off three years ago. We sat for hours before the blazing fire in my chambers, and I listened while Morrison told me in his strange jerky way of his adventures and of the life he had been leading. He told me of many things he had done and seen—of his adventures as a war correspondent, as a mining engineer and in half a dozen other professions lower down the scale.

Ten hours passed like minutes to me, when suddenly he came back with a swoop to the present.

He told me that he was doing nothing just then ; he had come that day to town to attend a sale of the furniture and effects of an uncle who had died recently.

“I didn’t benefit to any great extent under the will,” he added, answering a question I had not cared to put. “My sister took the bulk. She lived with the old man, and she detests me.”

He spoke as though the matter was of small consequence, but I could not help noticing that my friend’s outward appearance was not that of affluence. The light of the lamp betrayed the unhealthy lustre of his coat. It was beautifully clean, but it was shabby. His trousers showed signs of wear, and his boots had seen the cobbler more than once. He did not seem in the smallest degree depressed, however, and his conversation gave no hint of poverty. He stopped in the middle of a sentence as his eye rested for a moment on the brown paper parcel which he had placed on the table when he came in.

He stretched out his hand for it and began to tug at the knots in the string with his long white fingers —talking all the while. “I forgot about this,” he said, “you are a connoisseur in such things and you might like to see it. I have hardly looked at it myself, but it struck me as uncommon. I told you about my uncle’s sale. Well ! Somehow or other, I can’t say exactly why, I made up my mind to be there. I had a trifle under the will—a trifle so small as to seem almost ironically intended. I thought I would go and spend a part of it in some little trifle to remind me of the old gentleman. I was fond of him many years ago.

“There was the usual rabble in the auction rooms, and I soon tired of the noise, and the dust, and the droning of the auctioneer, and the tapping of the hammer. So I went to lunch, taking the catalogue with me, and, for one reason and another, I was away an unconscionable time. I think I half went to sleep after lunch. At all events, when I got back to the rooms, the affair was almost over. Nearly all the people were gone, and only two or three job lots remained unsold.

“I went in for one of them at random, and received a whole collection of rubbish—some old candlesticks, a pair of fire-dogs which, together with some other odds and ends, I left behind. I brought away this.” He removed the brown paper as he spoke, and held up a little ebony framed mirror. It was very small, in fact, the smallest mirror I have ever seen. I don’t suppose it measured more than twelve inches square, and the frame was deep, so that the glass—or what I took to be the glass—was tiny.

It was very dirty, and evidently had not been used for many years. The keen polish of the ebony had long ago disappeared, and the mirror within was blurred with long accumulations of dust and stains. In its present state it was impossible to examine it properly, but a little rubbing and dusting soon put it in a fairly respectable condition.

I have a certain superficial knowledge of curios and antique furniture, and, as I examined the mirror, I felt no doubt whatever that Morrison had stumbled on a treasure from a collector's point of view. It was quite unlike anything I had ever seen before, and in many ways it puzzled me.

The wide ebony frame was bevelled back and perfectly smooth, and the removal of dirt and dust revealed a curious and irregular pattern inlaid in some dark metal—probably silver—running round it. At the bottom of this was a large A, and at the top of the mirror the letter N was carved into the wood.

Apparently the wood was one piece, cut out of the solid block, for no join of any kind was visible even on the closest inspection. The thing completely baffled me. I could not suggest the period to which it belonged, or even the nationality of the workmanship.

All the information I could give was that it was old and valuable, and with that I handed back the curio to its owner. Morrison took the mirror from me and, moving close to the light, began carefully to examine the pattern on the frame with a little magnifying glass which he always carried, rubbing the wood and peering at it with his neck craned forward like a great bird. He grew very interested in his examination; so interested that he quite forgot my presence, and muttered inarticulately under his breath. I was becoming impatient, when at last he looked up and put away the glass.

"What do you make of it?" I asked.

"What do I make of it?" he said slowly, and his manner seemed to me to become suddenly strained and artificial. "What do I understand about such things? I will take it to a dealer. It is a funny old curiosity."

He rose as he spoke, and, looking at his watch, took up his hat. A few minutes before he had seemed in no hurry to go, but now suddenly time was of importance to him; he had an appointment which he must keep. I did not try to dissuade him, for I knew my man; so I took the mirror from the table and prepared to make a parcel of it. As I placed it face upwards on the paper I looked into the glass, now clean and clear, and became aware of a strange thing.

My eyes looked into a black shining void, like a smooth, deep pool under a bright moon. "Morrison," I called out sharply, "this is a strange mirror. It doesn't throw a reflection." He did not seem astonished and interested, as I thought he would; but he came and looked over my shoulder in an absent-minded way and began to button his gloves. "It is strange, certainly," he said at last; "I noticed it before you spoke. I want to examine it carefully. And look here, Hill, don't mention this to anyone. I have my reasons. The thing may be of value. I rather think it is, and I don't want a lot of dealers coming round to worry me.

Good-bye," he added quickly, making for the door with the mirror in his hand, "so glad to have seen you. Look you up again soon."

The door slammed and he was gone.

PART II.

One day, a month or six weeks later, in the early spring, I came back to my chambers after lunch, and discovered Morrison there waiting for me. I was shocked to see the change in his appearance. His face—always pale—was now the colour of dull wax. The bright eyes, more restless than ever, looked out from the black shadows which surrounded them with a vitality strange to see in that corpse-like face. His manner, I thought, was wild and strange. His clothes were even shabbier than when I had last seen him.

My first thought, I am ashamed to say, was that he wished to borrow money, for I could see that he had come with some definite object, and that, for some reason, he was unwilling to address me on it. He seemed to me like a man who, having made up his mind to some course, and embarked upon it, yet hesitates to carry it through. He sat in my big arm-chair, with his head on his hands, looking into the fire, and gradually a ragged conversation came to a standstill. We drifted into silence, and at last Morrison began :

"When was I last here, Hill?" he said.

"It must have been six or seven weeks ago," I replied, "I have the date in my diary."

"That was the day I showed you the mirror, wasn't it? Six weeks! It seems six years to me. Now," he added, looking up at me suddenly, "I am going to tell you all about it. I don't know why I should. You won't believe me—at least, I can't think you will. But I have reached that point when I must tell *someone* or go mad; and as you were the first to see the thing, I come to you. You won't, at least, proclaim me a madman from the house-tops.

"Since I was here last I have been working like a slave—harder, I believe, than man ever worked before. I have slept when I could no longer keep awake, and I have bolted food when I was starving. I was working at the mirror. Now don't interrupt me." He paused, as though to collect his thoughts. "You noticed, of course, when I hurried off so rudely that day that something about the thing had awakened my strongest interest. In reality, as I said good-night, I was literally boiling to be at home and alone with it. I little thought, when I entered your rooms that afternoon with that parcel under my arm, that I had, wrapped in an old piece of brown paper, a treasure, a possession of such power and value as to make the mind of man reel at the bare thought of it.

"When you rubbed the dirt and dust from the silver, I examined that circular inscription under the magnifying glass, and then it was that I noticed the extraordinary nature of the glass itself. It was apparent at once that it was no mirror, and I recognised that I held in my hand one of those old crystals which the wise men of the past had used as a mode of divination.

"I used to be interested in the subject of crystalomancy a few years ago, and I remember examining the famous Dr. Dee's crystals in the British

I dare say you yourself have heard of Lady Blessington's crystal which figured in the Morrison libel action in 1863? Those are the most recent examples of well-known crystals. But the crystal of the mirror was not one of these. It was of great age, and it differed in many respects from any of the crystals of modern times of which there is any record. Those two letters—the 'A' at the bottom of the inscription, and the 'N' carved into the ebony at the top, gave me the clue. The truth flashed on me in a moment: for the 'A' stands for Agrippa and the 'N' for Nettesheim, the family to which he belonged, and the mirror was the ancient mirror of Cornelius Agrippa, the Philosopher, who died at Grenoble in 1535.

"For hundreds of years the crystal of Agrippa—the most famous of all—has never been heard of. Some writers have even doubted its existence, though a description of it is to be found among Agrippa's writings. It was before me now, and, full of enthusiasm and a strange sensation of anticipation, I set forth to read the inscription.

"And here I must explain a little. The subject of crystallomancy had interested me for a time, but it soon failed to satisfy me. The results of a series of experiments made by me, although they showed beyond all question the existence of some power altogether beyond our common knowledge, yet never realised any valuable or definite purpose. The crystal would produce before one's eyes images of some sort, but almost invariably these images were of such a kind that nothing whatever could be deduced from them. They were disconnected and useless.

"But the crystal of Agrippa, if what has been written is true, gives the power to him who understands its use to read the future as a man may read the pages of a book. I was convinced that the secret of its use lay hidden in that inscription which ran round the mirror.

"A week of unremitting labour found me no nearer a solution; then a mere chance gave me a clue and I worked all the harder, till three days ago I held the answer and read off the writing."

I could see Morrison's long thin fingers trembling as he stretched them to the fire; his eyes were shining with excitement. He continued:

"That night I made my first experiment. I took the mirror and placed it before me in a half darkened room. What else I did I need not tell you; but I carried out the instructions of the inscription carefully. As I gazed into the mirror I fixed all my mind on the experiment, and, after a time, I seemed to sink into a state of half unconsciousness. The tumult of my thoughts subsided and an absolute tranquillity supervened. I felt as a drowning man might feel who gives up the struggle and sinks slowly down into the depths of the sea.

"Then the mirror began to glow beneath my eyes and a mist swept swiftly across its surface. The mist lifted and I looked into the future. What I saw I saw but for a moment. The image faded slowly and the mist drifted once again across my eyes. I felt myself alone in the darkness. Horror, a dreadful nausea overcame me. I tried to find then, I suppose, I fainted. My old



housekeeper found me on the floor, hours later, and thought me dead.

"That was my first experiment. It was some time before there was a second. I was prostrated for several days and kept my bed. The knowledge of what I possessed was too much for me." He stopped suddenly and looked up at me in his quick, keen way. "Do you believe all this?" he said.

I do not know what was my answer to this point blank query. I had been expecting it, yet it took me by surprise. I could not tell him that his brain had given way, and that he was the victim of an absurd hallucination.

I stammered out something—I don't know what—and I could hear him muttering to himself gently as he rocked his body backwards and forwards in his chair. I noticed again how terribly ill he looked, with his bloodshot eyes, and the dead white colour of his face.

"Hill," he said at last, after a long pause, "I swear it is true. I cannot convince you. I was a fool to think I could. I see what you think, but you are wrong. I have looked into the future. I have seen through a glass darkly—not always with perfect comprehension—but I *have* seen. The mirror is my servant. It obeys me; it shows me what I wish. I have already looked into it many times. It has shown me frightful things, things which you would not believe if I told them to you." He stopped, and seemed unable to continue for a time, but, with an effort, he went on, leaning forward, and speaking almost in a whisper:

"We see London to-day, a huge city, teeming with life, surging with traffic, a place of noise and movement, of pleasure, and pain, and excitement. I have seen London in the future, a great city still, with the same fine buildings and broad streets all blazing in a June sunshine, but without one single sign of life or movement, a great city of the dead, a huge, silent city filled with corpses—and the enemy without.

"There are new horrors of war coming, the bare possibility of which we have never even contemplated. And we sit still and wait for it. Oh! These politicians! what fools they are.

"Do you know, Hill, in my first madness of horror at what I had seen, I wrote a letter of warning to—never mind to whom—a great man. I forgot that it was inevitable, that it must all come to pass. I was out of my mind. I told him of new and terrible engines of destruction, of the peril which is so imminent, and I had a formal letter from his secretary which showed me what a fool I had been.

"The knowledge of these things and the absolute powerlessness to do anything to avert them haunt me.

"Sometimes I hate the mirror and swear to destroy it.

"I took it in my hand yesterday, and was within an ace of dashing it on the ground. But the fascination of the thing withheld me. I have seen so little yet." He paused and put his hand to his face with a sort of hopeless gesture.

"Morrison," I said. "For God's sake pull yourself together. You are ill. I can see it for myself. You must rid yourself of these horrible delusions,

leave London at once and rest ; but first destroy this mirror."

He shook his head. "No," he said slowly, "You are wrong. These are no delusions. I was never saner than I am at this moment—my intellect was never clearer. But I was foolish to think you would believe me I shall not destroy the mirror—not yet at least I must go now. Good-bye. Some day, perhaps you will know I have told you the truth."

That interview with Morrison affected me strangely. It upset my nerves ; it robbed me of sleep. There were times when I seemed to believe in the magic mirror and all that I had heard that day. Something in the story itself, but more still in the manner of its narration, had captured my fancy. Morrison's terrible earnestness haunted my mind. That he himself believed there could be no doubt. I dreamed and dreamed that it was true. It did not seem absurd to me then ; but rather something infinitely fantastic and somehow horrible. I felt miserable about Morrison ; and a continued uneasiness drove me out one day from my chambers to pay my friend a visit in his rooms in Upper Baker Street. It was an April day ; the sun, now bright, now obscured by great patches of purple cloud. Showers of fine cold rain

fell at intervals. It was cheerless—more cheerless, it seemed to me, than the coldest winter day. The wind rushed down in heavy, uncertain gusts and the ever recurring blotting out of the sun struck a strange chill. As I neared my destination I became aware of a feeling of impending disaster. Once I nearly turned back. I found the house and rang the bell, and as I did so I heard a sound within that struck upon my nerves. It was the noisy sobbing of a woman. The door was opened at last by a pale-faced maid.

"You cannot come in, sir," she said, "there's a dreadful thing has happened this morning."

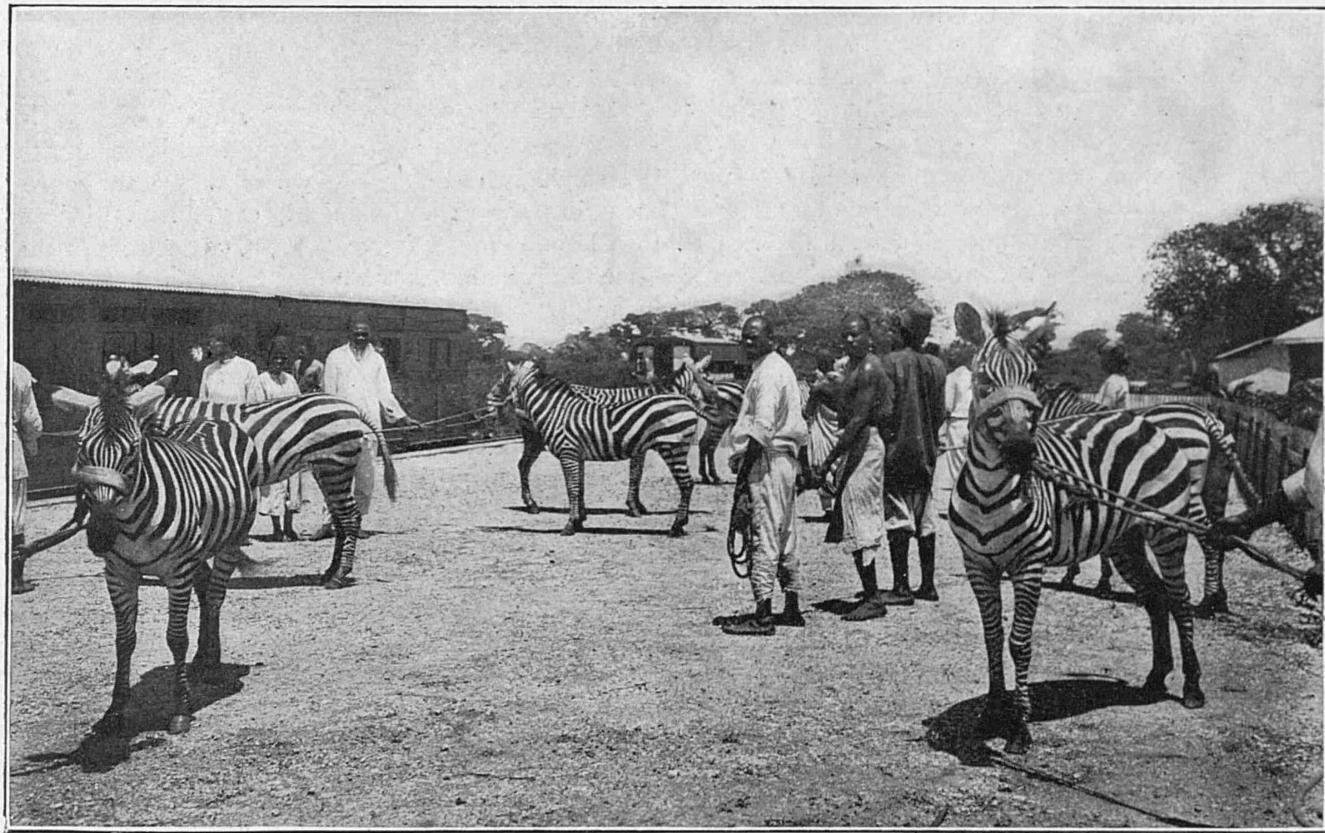
I asked for Morrison with dry lips.

"He shot himself this morning," said the girl, and burst into tears.

I pushed by her, and entered a room where two people were talking in whispers.

He lay in the corner, covered with a sheet, and close by him was a dark stain on the floor. By the window my eye caught something which glittered with shining particles. I stepped towards it with a sudden impulse. I recognised the little ebony frame, now shattered and broken.

The mirror which it had contained lay in a thousand fragments on the floor.



A Consignment of Zebras from Kilimanjaro, East Africa, Wrecked while en route for the St. Louis Exhibition

This consignment of twenty-eight Zebras from the German taming farm at Mount Kilimanjaro, East Africa, left Mombasa in the ss. *Kurfurst* on April 16. There were some frantic scenes at Mombasa station when the zebras were released from the boxes. The first native who approached a box had his fez cap bitten off and munched into tatters in an instant by a zebra, and the plunging and dashing of the little animals was something to witness. In a few minutes, however, they settled down, and were led quietly through the streets of the town, to all appearances as tame as donkeys. On board ship, when the moon shone at night, they all joined in a sort of melancholy howling, more like the barking of dogs than the neighing of horses, and kept it up for about five minutes at a time. By careful handling they became quite tame during the voyage, and after a while would put out their heads and necks to be caressed by the passengers. Our correspondent who sent us the photograph left the *Kurfurst* at Naples. On the voyage to Hamburg the ship was wrecked, near Sagres, on the coast of Portugal, and is a total loss. The cargo of zebras were intended for the St. Louis Exhibition. According to one report, some of the zebras were saved

OUR WORLDLY SHORT STORY—No. 50

POST-MORTEM

By ARTHUR RANSOME

(Author of "The Stone Lady," etc.)

DERSLY and I went to the *séance* together, though neither of us held any very vivid faith in the possibilities of spiritualism. The tickets had been sent us by one of those people who are never happy until they feel that their own beliefs are shared by their acquaintances. Our faith in the performance was of no fanatic order. It was no more than the general open-eyed interest of young scientific men. He is a young doctor, and I, well, for the last twelve years I have been looking about me, interested in everything, and enjoying things in my own way.

The hall was full of people. There was the indefinable stir of black coats, white collars, and pale dresses, and the crackle of stiff frocks that makes a crowd felt even in a dim room. On a low platform, completely surrounded by the chairs of the spectators, sat two mediums and a demonstrator in the light of a little red-shaded lamp. They seemed just the intense, ostentatiously earnest folk I had imagined such people would be.

Presently, the demonstrator, an ugly little, bristle-haired fellow, with a bulging waistcoat, stood up and explained what was about to happen. He was to send one of the mediums into a trance, when it was not unlikely that in some way or other the spirit world would make itself manifest. He asked for a serious demeanour on the part of the audience, and hoped that, by concentrating their goodwill for the success of the experiment, the spectators would lessen the difficulties of the medium.

One of the mediums, a blonde and vacant-looking girl, had seated herself in readiness at the side of a little table where pencils and paper had been laid. He turned towards her, spoke to her, and made a few passes over her, and, so suddenly that even in the faint light it was noticeable by the audience, her body seemed to relax and lie passive in the chair, leaning over a little towards the table. Throughout the room there was a low murmur of excited petticoats. It was impossible not to watch with considerable curiosity.

The little demonstrator moved the girl's arm round on the table, and we could see under the faint red light of the lamp that her fingers were trembling limply, and that her hand moved at the wrist. He put a pencil in her fingers, and, after one or two failures to place the paper in the right position, he so managed that the girl half lay across the table, with the pencil in her hand just resting on the white sheets.

And then she began to write. Hesitatingly at first, the pencil moved in her limp hand, and then with greater certainty, and increasing speed, until it seemed to fly over the paper.

"It's a fraud," Dersly whispered to me, but I could

tell that he was as much affected by the uncanny business as I was myself.

All over the room a faint hiss of whispers rose, until they were silenced by a warning movement of the demonstrator, and succeeded by a stir of petticoats. What were those words traced without effort, and apparently without understanding, by that limp figure on the platform? What meant this message from some being whom not one of us had seen? Or, perhaps, had one of us known the writer? Or, again, was it certain that the writer was not the girl herself, well trained in simulating complete unconsciousness? All these questions were expressed in the rustling murmur of frocks that defied the silencing gestures of the bristle-headed little man on the stage.

At last the hand fell limp again, and the writing stopped. The demonstrator picked up the sheets of paper that he had been laying one by one beneath the quickly moving pencil, and woke the medium with a series of rapid passes. He gave a signal, and the attendants turned on the electric lights, so that we blinked after the gloom. Sorting the papers into order, he read them through, and read them once again with eyebrows raised. Then he rose and spoke hurriedly, in a voice that trembled with excitement.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "in the whole course of my career as an experimenter I have never witnessed the arrival of so extraordinary a message from that world which the ancients knew, and of which we have for so long allowed ourselves to remain in ignorance. I doubt if any spirit document so long, so coherent, so amazing as this has ever been received before. Ladies and gentlemen, we are fortunate in having been present to-night at the reception of the extraordinary communication that I am about to read. Extraordinary as it is, there is a logical sequence in its sentences that shows it to be of far more importance than those futile babblings that have more than once been accepted by men even eminent as revelations from the spirit world. If we cannot, as I confess I cannot, believe in the actuality of the events described in this statement, I think we are justified in assuming that it contains a meaning for us. If it is not a narrative of fact, it is a noble allegory. Who can tell what great truth may not be found in the words I am about to read? Ladies and gentlemen, this is the proudest moment of my life."

He read:—

"... a man of very strong will [the manuscript opens like that; it is clear that some words were missed by the recording medium]. Having enough money to be able to live my own life, I did so, and spent all my days from my seventeenth year in the study of human nature, and in the development of

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the powers that I believe to be latent in every strong personality. I travelled in India and in other parts of the East, and continued my studies under the guidance of Hindoo sages, and a Japanese priest. Under their tuition, I came gradually towards that perfect control of the body by the spirit that is the object of the Eastern Yogis and Mahatmas. Only, while by its means they wish to attain peace, I desired only knowledge. Desire of knowledge filled my life with a perpetual thirst. I could not talk to a man for a moment in a railway station without experiencing an overpowering longing to enter into his life, and to understand it as fully, as clearly, as I had brought myself to comprehend my own. I knew that by the same means that win for the Oriental sages their nonchalant peace I should be able to obtain my supreme desire, and by freeing my spirit completely from the thrall of the body, be able to enter at will into the existences of others.

"With this end constantly before me, I sustained the severe discipline of my teachers, until my powers were as complete as theirs; and, indeed, I liked to fancy, greater. I was able by an effort of will to dissociate my spirit absolutely from my flesh. I was able to go where I wished by the simple effort of will, and to return instantaneously to my body and ordinary existence, when I willed that it should be so"

The little demonstrator stopped reading for a moment, and looked round the room on the faces of his audience. There was an instant murmur of interest and surprise that died into the breathless silence of expectancy, when he turned again to the sheets in his hand.

" When my powers had reached this state, I returned to England alone. I told no one of my powers. I told no one of what I had been doing. I was too interested in mankind to care to interest it in myself. I took a small house in _____, one of the southern suburbs of London. (Here Dersly nudged my arm. The man had mentioned the district where his practice lay. I nudged him back, and we continued listening.) I settled here in this small house that I furnished very simply. Externals were of no importance to me whatever. I continued my life of investigation.

"One of the rooms of the house I kept absolutely for my own use. The old housekeeper I had engaged was forbidden on pain of dismissal to meddle with it, or even to open its door. She was a trustworthy person up to a point, and I allowed her so much money a week, and left the management of the house to her sole control. Twice every day she laid a simple meal for me in one of the ordinary rooms. I would come out of my privacy, eat it, and again retire. If I did not appear, she had orders to make no inquiries, but to lay the next meal as if I had been present at the one preceding. To make myself doubly secure I had a double door built to my private room. (At this point Dersly made a convulsive movement, which I attributed to his interest in the document.)

"In my private room I would sit and meditate, and perform those other ceremonies prescribed by the wisdom of the East for those who seek to prepare themselves for the exercise of spiritual powers. Then, when I wished to pursue my researches in the motives of men, I would lock both doors, to secure myself from any possible interruption, and then, putting the keys in my pocket, and lying on the sofa make the supreme effort of personality for which my training had prepared me, and leave my body where it lay.

"I had only to will to be in the place where I wished to experiment. To India, Italy, America, to any country on earth I could transport myself by a moment of passionate desire. Each wish was an agony, so great was its intensity. But each wish was gratified for the same reason. I could go to any place, and enter the life of any person, watching the actions of a mind, and understanding them as though they were my own. I had all the joys of a God, and none of the responsibility.

"My only care was to return before curiosity or other motive had induced meddlesome persons to discover my body, which lay dead on my sofa, until I chose to re-enter it. When I was ready to return I merely willed myself again in the flesh, and immediately reassumed command of my body, got up from the sofa, took the keys from my pocket, and passed out again to meet the complaining looks of my housekeeper on those occasions when by my tardy return I had given her the trouble of cooking a meal for nothing.

"Several years passed in this way. I made my spiritual excursions as often as twice a week during almost the whole of the time, though, for the reasons I have mentioned, I was always careful to limit the durations of my absences from the flesh. There came a time, however, when my zeal for knowledge, my unbridled curiosity I will now call it, for I know I sought a worthless thing, got the better of my discretion.

"I had become particularly interested in the relations between different coloured races. Not politically, of course, but from an individualistic standpoint. I had watched cases of inter-marriage between persons of different religions, and noticed the pulsations of revulsion between them. I was now interested in the inter-marriage of race. I had watched marriages between black and yellow, African and Malay, and observed the conjugal life of Western women and Turkish men, and many similar examples, in every case, I must remind you, studying not from without, but from within the minds of the characters concerned.

"My attention was caught by an American girl, who was on very friendly terms with a quadroon negro. I entered the negro's mind, and understood that he was passionately attracted by the girl, and was only restraining his emotions by continual remembrance of the bar of race between himself and her. It was inevitable that feelings as powerful as his should sooner or later break away the dam of his will, and carry him violently towards the object of his affections. I wished to be present in the mind of the girl, to watch the sudden revulsion that I knew must come, when her coloured friend should force her to think of him in a new, and, as I was pretty nearly assured, repugnant light. I devoted three successive of my spiritual journeys to the examination of these two, and found at the fourth that the moment I wished to observe was very near at hand. The quadroon, a very clever young fellow, respected in spite of his colour, was staying in the same house as the girl. They were constantly together, discussing various problems of social reform, and kept by this interest alone continually in each other's mind. Every moment I thought the girl would realise the meaning of the man's devotion to her. Every moment I might expect the movement of revulsion that I wanted to notice. I associated myself with the girl's mind, lived in her, sharing with her her every thought, dreaming with her her very dreams, for I could not be sure that the moment of understanding would not come to her asleep.

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"The moment came. She understood, and, as I had foreseen, was disgusted at the idea that came before her imagination. I watched the frightened activity of her mind, and saw her resolve to leave the house at once, and then, after perhaps the most perfect of all my experiments, I willed my return to the flesh. I had been five days and nights out of my body. The effort of will that was needed to bring me back was greater than it had ever been before. It was a terrible paroxysm of concentrated desire. . . ."

"I awoke in torture. A thousand thousand pricking pains ran through my body. My veins burned my flesh like white hot platinum wires. A deep booming sound filled my ears, which gradually formed itself into hammer-like throbings, which, even in my agony, I counted—one, two, and three. I could not speak, or make any sound at all. With a tremendous effort that seemed to loose another myriad demons to twist the skein of painful threads of which my body seemed to be made, I raised my head, and knew that I lay naked on a table. I saw a man with a knife turning towards me. I felt that even my power of will was slipping from me in the torture that plucked at my nerves and scorched my flesh. With all the life that was left to me I compelled my spirit to the mastery of the man with the knife. I drew him with my eyes. . . ."

Dersly suddenly stood up swaying, with his mouth opened as if he were trying to cry aloud. Two women in the audience shrieked, and he collapsed towards the floor.

"Stop that," I shouted at the demonstrator on the platform, not knowing quite what I shouted, or why; and then, with the help of a man who was sitting near us, carried my friend out of the hall. There was a little lavatory outside, where we bathed his forehead. Presently he was sufficiently recovered to get into a cab, when we drove to my rooms, which were not far away.

I helped him to a chair in my study, poured a stiff whisky and soda into him, poured out another, and placed it by his side. He sat there as if half asleep. I have seen more than one man in a moment of strong physical fear, and more than one in the cruellest of mental torture, but I have never seen such a look as Dersly gave me when he opened his eyes. It was like a terrible memory that stares at one, whether one will or no, and will not be forgotten. His eyes, usually merry, alert, eager with the bright energy of the scientist, were like the eyes of an unfortunate madman whom I once saw, possessed by a mania that kept the fear of murder and sudden death his constant companion. I could not look away, and his eyes stared at me. I tell you I felt better when I realised that he did not see me. He put his hands together before his face, and moved them suddenly outwards, as if pushing from him some terrible vision that sought to crowd itself into his brain.

"Dersly!" I said; and again, "Dersly! Dersly!"

The whole of his body shook, from head to foot, and then he seemed to take himself by force and pull himself together. He moved suddenly in the chair, and drank off the glass with sobbing gulps.

"Allegory," he said. "My God, it was true!" The words seemed to shudder on his lips.

"What was true?" I asked, thinking to soothe him, and pouring out another glass for him, clinking the bottle and the glass together with my trembling hands.

"I was the man in the room," he whispered; and then, drinking off the third glass, sat bolt upright in the chair.

"The room had double doors. There could be no other."

"I do not understand," I said. "Tell me another time."

"No, no, no!" he almost shouted; and I saw that it would relieve him to share the thing that was on his mind. He spoke on rapidly.

"Five years ago a very extraordinary man lived in a house in my own district. He lived alone with a housekeeper, and had an odd habit of locking himself in a room, for as long as a whole day at a time. The room had double doors, and the housekeeper was forbidden to open them. For some years this lonely man's life continued, and then, after going into the room one morning, he did not return for lunch or dinner, and did not go to his bedroom at night. The housekeeper, who thought him mad, took no notice, thinking it, as she told me, as much as her place was worth to meddle with the double doors. But when he did not appear next morning, and had not come back at night again, she did the only thing she could, and communicated with the police. They broke open the door, and found the man lying dead on the sofa. The keys of the room were in his coat pocket. There was nothing to show how he had died, but he was too healthy a man, and the circumstances of the case were too unusual, to allow his death to be certified in the ordinary way. A post-mortem was ordered, and I was the surgeon called in to perform it.

"I had already opened his stomach and removed the intestines, preparatory to chemical examination. I had exposed the heart, and had turned aside for a moment to wipe my instruments, when I heard a slight stir on the table. I thought it was no more than the motion of a linen cloth lifted by a draught of air. Then I turned round. It was very hot weather, and for a moment I thought the heat was playing tricks with my brain. For the man's nerves had resumed their sensitiveness. A live nerve is a very different-looking thing from a dead one, you know. The blood that had congealed in the veins had broken out again. The inside of the body, that I had cleaned, perspired with crimson drops. The pale bags of the lungs were feebly throbbing. And then, as I looked, the man moved his head, and I saw into his eyes. He was alive.

"He was alive, and in the most acute pain that it is possible to conceive. He was alive, and would remain alive for minutes, perhaps hours, until the torture exhausted his vitality. It was impossible to save him.

"And then I saw his eyes, drawing me against myself. I knew what he desired. I saw the wild, fierce pain looking out of them, and I knew that in this man there was one thing stronger than the pain. His eyes, tortured as he was, drew me, drew me, though I held back, a weak and little thing in the presence of that tortured indomitable will. Suddenly, he conquered. I picked up a lancet and punctured his heart as it beat before me in his breast.

"When next I knew anything, I was standing holding tight to the edge of the table. Some time must have passed, for the body had again assumed, this time with reality, the appearance of a corpse.

"I certified his death from heart failure, and, until to-night, I had forced myself to think that it was a dream, that I had slept standing by the operating table. I could not let myself believe that I had killed a man. I could not let myself believe that I had seen that . . . that thing. . . ."

And Dersly fainted again.

ARTHUR RANSOME.

Worldly
Short
Story
No. 58

THE PRE-EXISTENCE PARTY

By MRS. BAILLIE-SAUNDERS

(Author of "Saints and Society")

TO WORLDLY AUTHORS

Any of our readers who have written stories which they think would be suitable for our *Worldly Series* are invited to send in their Manuscripts, which must be typewritten. A story by an unknown writer will receive just as much consideration as though it had been written by one of the most celebrated authors of the day, and, if accepted, will be liberally paid for. Only good stories are wanted!

"I TOLD you no one could be admitted unless they had had a previous existence," said Aïda, crossly.

"You didn't tell the butler," said William. "He let me in. Perhaps he thought I could pick one up when I got in here amongst all you occultists. Isn't there somebody over that I could have for mine—say a cast-off one?"

"Nonsense," said Aïda. "You'll simply spoil the séance. I purposely didn't invite any scoffers. The only thing, now you have got in, is to hurriedly glance over your sensations and find a 'temple.' We call our bygone personalities our 'former temples.' Can't you recollect something that would give you a clue?"

William, who had been looking exceedingly blank, suddenly beamed with inspiration.

"Well, now I look round your drawing-room, I admit that I experience a strange, weird feeling of having been there before! What can it mean? The only thing against it is that last night I remember experiencing exactly the same sensation when I went into the Vaudeville bar. And the other night, when I kissed a nice girl at a dance——"

"You are utterly stupid," snapped Aïda.

"I should be ashamed to own up that I hadn't had a 'former temple.' Everybody has them nowadays, and if they're not respectable they're at least illustrious. The only people," she added significantly, with a freezing glance, "who have none at all are naturally those who are on the downward grade, going down stage by stage till they reach beetles."

William's blood froze. "It may be that," he said, gazing back at her. "Now I think of it I've already got some characteristics in common with beetles. I run after ladies, and I don't come out till after dark, and I'm often in warm places, and I get trodden upon—you tread on me. My head is already black and shiny—I only need antennæ, and a leg or two more, and then——"

He wriggled his fingers suggestively.

"Ugh!" shrieked Aïda, "don't be so disgusting! I would positively have you turned out, only I think the séance may convert you. I hope it will, anyway."



Reveries

(Photographic study by Fellows-Willson)

Aïda is the Hon. Mrs. Dree-Hazey, a quite celebrated mystic. She wears thin, creepy, crawly clothes, and is often photographed with a snake on her shoulder. He isn't a real snake—indeed his stuffing is coming out—but carefully posed, he looks positively sensational, especially as he is far more stripy than the real thing.

She goes in hotly for ghost-parties and psychical soirées, and simply loves séances, which she gives on a large scale, and bullies people into taking her "spooks" seriously. But she had been reading the newspaper correspondence on "Have We Lived

Before," and hence her present idea was an improvement on all former exhibitions of this sort, for it was simply a spiritualistic séance at which were due to appear all the previous personalities of the guests! It was a large order, too. You were obliged, upon accepting the invitation, to state who you believed you had been in a previous state. You were then to prepare to meet him, or her, at the Dree-Hazey's.

So far everybody was really excited at the idea. But now the scoffing William, a horrid, unbelieving barrister and Aïda's cousin, had arrived unexpectedly just as the guests were beginning to rustle into the huge drawing-room, draped for the occasion with weird, dim Egyptian curtains of some sort, and evidently prepared for a séance on a large and serious scale.

Aïda herself, remarkable in a clinging garment of green sequins, with her hair quite a new colour, looked distinctly worried, and consequently terrifying. Worry always upsets her temper.

"It's no good you're being aggravating to-night, William," she said. "The creatures themselves are quite aggravating enough—my guests, I mean. They will snap up all the important and beautiful people in history, and the worst of it is they are always hitting on the same people! You will hardly believe me, but there are two Julius Cæsars, and I have positively given up counting the Mary Queen of Scots! They are so silly to all hit on her—there are such lots of other beautiful women they could have been."

"Yes, they might even try being beautiful in this existence for a change. Well, I should let them fight

Another Worldly Story Next Week

it out. It will prevent things falling flat—all except the combatants. They may."

"I shall simply trust to tact."

"Yes, do. And may I ask who was your own former temple?"

"O, I was Cleopatra."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, whenever I am by the sea I feel a most strange, weird sense of familiarity, as though I ought to be reclining back on a palanquin, while huge crowds come round to admire me. It is a strange feeling."

"Not so strange, I assure you. Lots of people feel very similar. I have noticed it at Brighton. It is only the crowds who do not really rise to it, usually. But as I'm only a novice, may I ask whether Cleopatra—she was rather a doubtful person—has come down the grade for her sins, or has gone up higher, is now reaching you as a stage? Are you, may I inquire, a higher or a lower stage—from her point of view?" There was an ominous silence.

"Well, really, William," said Aida at last, a nasty look about the corners of her nose, and an unpleasant gleam in her eye, "when you become a beetle I will make the same inquiry!"

Conversation after this becoming momentarily impossible, William withdrew into a corner by an Egyptian curtain and watched the arrivals—who now began to come streaming in. He had expected a crowd, but now he was amazed to see who the people were.

There was Sir James McPhee, the famous Scottish surgeon, a hard-headed, cute old person, the last one would have thought to come to what William called "a bogey show." Really, Aida was very clever to persuade such intellectuals to humour her fads! Or were the intellectuals getting at Aida? The idea came suddenly as he caught a gleam of the eminent Scotchman's eye, not unlike the glance of an Aberdeen terrier up to tricks and covering them by extra sobriety of mien.

But this could not be true of all of them. There, just entering, was the stout and self-assertive Lady Blamey, a person of terrific solemnity, and impossible to associate with "tricks" of any kind. She must surely be a believer. Near to her in the crowd stood Dinsley, a well-known police-court magistrate, an after-dinner wit and *raconteur*, looking terrifically serious for once. Perhaps he was going through the pre-existence to his dinner, having rushed on here from work? He often merged into another grade after it.

Young Lady Higby, a famous Society bride, glittered like a star upon his vision out of a crowd of her friends, and a well-known Cabinet Minister, a great Royal Academician, two novelists, male and female—but fearfully hard to distinguish, as one had long red hair, and the other a stiff collar and tie—and any amount of the usual beautifully "turned-out" women and rather sheepish men.

Sheepishness seemed to hang over the gay throng like a pall. In a familiar drawing-room, however carefully disguised and glittering with gay lights, lively with music, and full of flowers and pretty women, it is not easy to hold forth on your serious belief that you were once Alexander the Great. Somehow you don't feel altogether comfortable, and not quite big enough, except about the feet, which seem too big. There appeared to be a paucity of conversation, and nobody looked too eagerly into his

neighbour's eyes. William, however, who had discovered a radiantly pretty girl standing near him, obviously under Aida's own chaperonage, quite made up for this latter failing; and he was beginning thoroughly to enjoy himself, and to concoct plans for a really spiritualistic conversation, if he could persuade his busy cousin to introduce him, when suddenly the string band ceased playing, and a very cadaverous-looking man stood up on a Hindoo praying-mat at the end of the room and made an announcement in a weird, sing-song voice. It was to the effect that all the lights would now be put out, and if everyone would keep quite still, and not move, and each one concentrate his thoughts on his own personality, the *séance* would begin. There was absolutely nothing to fear, he said. But, as they had been informed, the spirits would appear one by one in answer to the Chief Medium's call, and those who felt themselves to have once occupied the same forms as "former temples" could address them, with reverence, and would receive an answer.

This was very thrilling, and the effect of the sudden switching off of the electric light was exceedingly dramatic, only that a buzz of whispering now succeeded the earlier chilled silence as by a stroke of magic.

"Sh-sh-sh!" angrily cried the voice from the now invisible mat. "No talking, if you please; we cannot have any talking. Ladies and gentlemen, I insist." And now a faint sound of half-muffled music began to wail in the darkness, and the *séance* began. Suddenly William felt his left arm violently clutched.

"It's only me," said the voice of Aida, coming sepulchrally through the black gloom. "Do help me in a most awful dilemma. To my horror I find that there are FIVE Mary Queen of Scots, and two are most awfully huffy! When her ghost appears will you, O William, as you value our friendship, take care of two for me? O William, don't refuse. Keep with them, entertain them, stop them saying anything if you possibly can, or there may be a regular scene! You see they all claim her as theirs."

"But, Great Scott!" he whispered. "Who are they? How shall I find them in this darkness? Do I know them?"

"One is Lady Blamey, and the other is Violet Vicars," she answered hurriedly. "All you've got to do is to play up to both of them that *she* was Mary Stuart—it's easy enough in the dark. I've posted trustworthy men with the other three, so these are really the last to see to."

William gasped, but gasps do not show in the darkness, and the next moment he found himself dragged along and placed between two people; that one was Lady Blamey he could tell by the stertorous breathing on his right, and a waft of mignonette scent coming from the other side, he concluded that this was Miss Violet Vicars, a person whom he had never set eyes on. It requires tact to be suddenly placed between an old and a young lady in the dark—both perfect strangers—with a view to persuading them that they were not Mary Queen of Scots in a former existence. But William resolved to do his best.

The slow music getting slower and slower, and the enveloping darkness now really beginning to get on people's nerves, there was a tendency to hush the whispered chatter, and, some mystic sentences in Hebrew having now been uttered, in a fearfully solemn tone, by, presumably, the man on the mat, quite a thrill went round the assembly.

He said, "Watch!" very seriously, adding, "Beware!" and everybody craned forward to look, as suddenly a tiny blue light appeared somewhere over

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the mat, about the height of a man's head. This gradually grew larger and larger, till it spread into a sort of softly livid radiance it was seen that a dark, shadowy bulk loomed against it. The light growing clearer and stronger, there was slowly revealed to the breathless audience first a white, upturned face, then the form of a man in eighteenth-century dress, standing perfectly still with shut eyes.

The voice of Aïda, now stretched to a tense and yearning pitch well known as her *séance* voice, now rose on the palpitating stillness.

"George Washington!" was all she said for a few awful seconds, then murmured in an undertone to someone apparently by her: "Will you kindly tell Mr. Dinsley to come forward if he has anything to say to his former temple?"

Before Dinsley could speak, a raucous voice broke the stillness hideously—the voice of McPhee, the Scotch surgeon.

"Aa-a-aie! Mr. Dinsley was never in yon mon. Mr. Washington never told a lee! He said so himself."

The voice of Dinsley arose. "He told the biggest one on record when he said that, anyhow!" he snapped.

In the fluttering titter that followed they got the ghost away somehow, and a friend of Dinsley's was heard to say:

"Congratulations, old man. There's no life like the present—you can tell as many here as you like."

But even as he spoke the spokesman gave an awful summons, there came a booming, moaning noise, and out of the disc of light a weird form, in a sort of loose blanket, appeared slowly waving its hands in rhythmic measure.

"Who on earth—," began somebody in the crowd.

"It's not on earth—it's a spirit. Julius Cæsar!" said the voice of Aïda, in solemn cadence.

But suddenly there rose fearsome sounds as of a hurried scuffle in the darkness, and after several gurgles, like those one hears above the melody in a cheap gramophone, a fierce voice roared out loudly:

"Pardon me—I tell you that is *my* personality! I sent the name into Mrs. Dree-Hazey myself. Mrs. Dree-Hazey, I appeal to you—did not I, Colonel Gibbs, send in the name of Julius Cæsar?"

"Yes, yes, I—"

"Nothing of the kind. That was *my* former temple."

"This is sheer nonsense, sir," went on the angry voice. "Two of us could not possibly have first lived in the same man."

"Two of you could easily get into the same blanket," croaked the voice of the Scotch surgeon. "Hech! It's muckle enough to make a mony brecks!"

Aïda's agonised "O, for heaven's sake!" may have appealed to the ghost, for he violently disappeared, oddly enough with a noise like someone being pushed hurriedly through a door and remonstrating in Cockney accents.

Several spirits followed in due order, but William hardly noticed them, being now worked up into agonised speculation as to what was going to happen to him when Mary Queen of Scots appeared. She was, as a matter of fact, the biggest monopoly of the lot, and as the tense moments passed he began to realise that with three other claimants in the room, and himself situated between two, the results might be serious.

Suddenly the heavy, aggressive voice of Lady Blamey rang in his right ear:

"Can you tell me whether, by communicating with the medium person, we can summon up any particular spirit? I should like to get mine over; I am due at Lady Wigmore's ball."

"O, yes," said William, weakly. "Whom do you require?"

"Mary Queen of Scots."

A soft voice at his other elbow said eagerly, "O, but—"

"Oh, hus-sh-sh-sh!" William imploringly whispered, just as the man on the mat gave an order and the redoubtable Mary Stuart appeared.

Then the voice of the base Aïda was heard to say, in a furtive stage whisper: "Come along, Muriel; this is your pre-personality. There are lots of things you can ask her; but do be quick."

There was a rustle of a lady's dress, as somebody answering to the name of Muriel made her way to the front, when a loud voice rang out at William's right hand.

"Excuse me," cried Lady Blamey, in the tones of a fog-horn, "that is *my* spirit!"

"O dear, O certainly, but—"

"But this is unfair. I insist on claiming my rights," bellowed the monstrous lady in the dark; and now two other ladies' voices joined the hubbub with similar claims.

"Good gracious!" said the soft voice at William's elbow. "This is getting serious. Aren't there a lot of us? What heaps of sides she must have had to her character!"

But Lady Blamey had now risen in all her ferocity and immensity. Her fierce voice was ringing across the tumult. Aïda was arguing, and the other three claimants were arguing, and Sir James McPhee was making running commentaries, while the entire room applauded or cried down the claimants in its own fashion. The noise was tremendous.

"Pardon me," continued Lady Blamey. "But I have the first claim. My case is unquestionable. Whenever I meet a Scotchman I am inexplicably reminded of Bothwell, and feel that he and I—"

"Sakes alive, spare us, madam," cried McPhee. "Reclect the mor-ahlities of the audience!"

"I don't wish to contradict anyone," cried the lady who had originally answered to Muriel. "But really my own sensations are more conclusive. Whenever I go to Calais I feel a weird sensation of something writing on my heart."

"Indigestion, ma'am. The cooking at yon tourist hotels is—"

"But really, Aïda," rang out the voice of another claimant. "Without wishing to be rude, or selfish, I do think she is really mine. Everything points to it. Whenever I pass the Tower I feel a strange sensation that I am losing my head."

"Aaie—it's a no uncommon feeling in the Ceety," put in McPhee. "But she wasn't beheaded there, neither. The Tower's juist been getting at ye, puir body. It was aye given to taking folk in."

"Well, really," said another. "I don't know how one actually settles these things, but my own experience is conclusive, to my mind. It is impossible for me to behold that tragic picture of Queen Mary in prison without feeling an overwhelming conviction that I ought to be there also."

"Hoots!" shrieked the ghastly McPhee in unholy delight. "If everybody who ought to be in prison feels like yon, there's mair lineal descendants of the Stuart line than we thocht!"

Aïda's voice came thick with fury. "Will someone kindly ask Sir James to permit the *séance* to proceed?"

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But William's left-hand neighbour seized his hand in the dark. "O do, please," she said, "help me to get out of this! Come along; no one will notice us in the dark. Quick!"

She tugged him along, and gladly and basely he fled with her, pushing pell-mell through the now volatile crowd, and never stopping till they sank down together, breathless and exhausted, in the hall. Then he glanced at his companion under the electric light, and to his joy saw that she was the pretty girl that he had noticed before the *séance*. His spirits rose mightily.

He was just beginning to be captivating, when at that moment violent sounds of falling chairs and raised voices emerging from the *séance* room like a rush of tempest, the charming lady fled to the door. "O dear," she said, "a hansom, please! I can't face all those creatures again. Quick!"

In double quick time he called a hansom, and without a word they jumped into it together and drove violently away, just as the furious occultists came sweeping down the stairs like loosened barbarian hordes rushing down a mountain side.

"I don't care what Mrs. Dree-Hazey thinks," said Violet. "She was chaperoning me, you know. But really, as she did me out of Mary, I can do as I like. It's only fair. Not that I want the tiresome creature. After this, I'm converted to dear, sensible, nice, old-fashioned Darwin for good and all. I'm never going to have been anything again but a monkey—a nice, friendly, skippy little monkey!"

"And I'm told I'm already half a beetle, so I'm sure no one will ever want to quarrel with us, will they? That's the best of choosing really unbecoming ones!"

In mutual congratulation they agreed to take supper at a restaurant, William arguing gently that as he was Aida's cousin, and as Aida had deserted her charge, this was only a reasonable arrangement. They had a very pleasant evening recovering from the *séance*, and William at least found his process of recovery absolutely delightful. Later on he drove the most *chic* and exquisite Violet home to her parents' abode, and in depositing her in Cambridge Square he left behind him his own heart in an existence where she was queen.

But Aida was furious with everybody. She wrote frantic letters to the papers, asking the editor or his readers intricate and occult questions as to exactly what signs might be taken as conclusive evidence of a certain person having been another in a former existence. Quite a fresh crop of correspondence arose on the question as to whether what was conclusive and what was inconclusive evidence could not be legally defined; and one gentleman, writing from the Junior Carlton, suggested that this matter should be set forth in a Bill to bring before Parliament in the next Session. He said he was sure there were Members who would be personally interested in defining what they had been in a pre-existence—for instance, what a Cabinet Minister had been when he came into office, and what he had turned into since. He said the tracing out of such a career would be most instructive. It would throw a new light on many things now seen through a glass too darkly—he might say some of them looked very dark indeed.

As for William's share in the affair, Aida accorded him one short and bitter interview, and then their relations virtually ceased. She said he had ruined the *séance*, as she thought he would. In vain he remarked on her wonderful second sight, even prophecy—she was not to be baited by such flattery. She said angrily, pacing her room in the cold morning light:

"You broke up the meeting by running away as you did! I blame you more than I do that unspeakable McPhee, for you left me alone, at the most terrible moment of all, to face that monstrous woman Blamey! You will never know what I suffered, what she said, and how she behaved. It was simply dreadful. William, I left her in your charge, to your honour, and you betrayed me by deserting in cowardly manner at the last moment. You utterly forgot your duty."

"O, but not utterly," pleaded William in his most pathetic "Counsel" voice. "You remember you gave me two Mary Queen of Scots to take care of? I relieved you of one. It was to convey her forcibly out of the room that I went so precipitately."

"It was?" Aida gazed in a stony manner, as though trying to elucidate a mystery. "Do you mean to say that when you went you took away Violet Vicars? Is that why she disappeared?"

"Yes. In order to save you further trouble, I——"

"So you and Violet went off together! Where did you go? Tell me."

"O, we had a little supper, then I took her home. She was beginning to get quite violent, I assure you. When the ghost of Mary Stuart appeared, the way she tugged at my coat-sleeve has left its marks—I declare it has. It was really unnerving, Aida. I can feel it now! But to save you any more bother, I——"

"Really, William, that is enough! I shall be having Sir James McPhee talking of saving me bother next!"

"Well, he did in a way. He shut up the Julius Caesars, didn't he?"

"I want no more discussion. Amongst you all I am rendered utterly miserable! I try to be spiritual, but everybody else is so material-minded. The row I had with that Lady Blamey will now be life-long, and as for Sir James, I shall do everything I can to show him up for the vulgar and impossible creature he is. It's no good being lofty-minded on this earth! We deep-souled women were always misunderstood!"

He longed to suggest that she should go back to Cleopatra, but he very wisely desisted, and let her have the last word. After all, he could have the laugh out with Violet, he said, and lost no time in getting it.

Two months later, when their engagement was announced, Aida was still much too angry with him to be on speaking terms. However, woman-like, she could not resist a marriage, and wrote her cousin and his charming *fiancée* a short note of congratulation, as little stiff as, under the circumstances, it was bound to be:

Violet flew to make it up with Mrs. Dree-Hazey.

"I'm really pleased, dear," said Aida, "and I'm sorry if you felt hurt about Mary Queen of Scots. You see it was Muriel's Calais business that seemed to me so convincing. However, after this, I know who really was Mary."

"Who?"

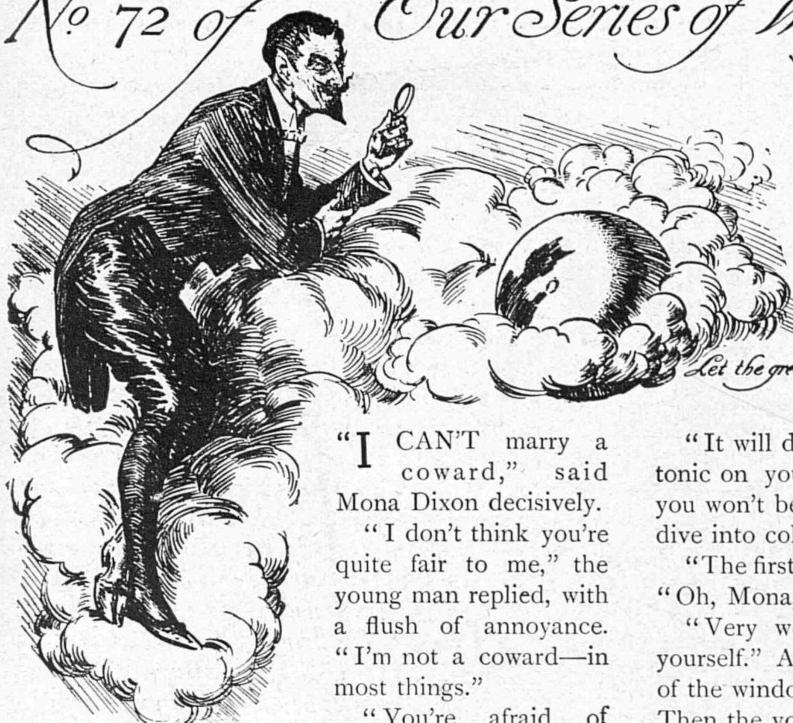
"Not Lady Blamey, not Muriel, not either of the others—but you!"

"But why?"

"Because you ran off with a man," said Aida, in a sepulchral voice. "That's more convincing than Calais, or Fotheringay, or everything else. I don't care whatever proofs the others bring up now. That was *exactly* Mary's way!"

MRS. BAILLIE-SAUNDERS.

No 72 of Our Series of Worthy Short Stories.



The Coward

By

J. B. HARRIS-BURLAND

Let the great book of the world be your principal study—Chesterfield

"I CAN'T marry a coward," said Mona Dixon decisively.

"I don't think you're quite fair to me," the young man replied, with a flush of annoyance. "I'm not a coward—in most things."

"You're afraid of ghosts," she retorted; "only little children are afraid of ghosts."

Harry Lennox looked at her with a wistful smile. She was a fresh-coloured, healthy girl, fond of every kind of outdoor pursuit, and a typical product of a materialistic century. She had as much imagination as a beefsteak. He was rather a weakling, something of a poet, sensitive, and credulous as a child. But he was rich, and so Mona Dixon had marked him for her own.

"You don't believe in ghosts," he said, after a pause. "I do, and I fear them."

"I can't marry a coward," she repeated. Then she turned her back on him, and walked over to the window.

"Mona," he said, reproachfully, "it's too bad of you to talk like this."

She did not answer him, but she stared out of the window at the miles of marshland which stretched from the bottom of the garden to the sea. It was a hot summer's day, and the air quivered over the dreary waste of mud and sea-lavender. In the distance, on the extreme edge of the land, there was a house. It had been empty for years, and its last occupant had killed himself. Possibly, the awful loneliness of the place had unhinged his mind.

But the sight of the desolate and half-ruined building evidently suggested mirth rather than tragedy to Mona Dixon, and she smiled. She saw the chance of having some fun.

"Have you ever been to the Black House, Harry?" she queried, suddenly turning round to him with a serious face.

"Never," he replied, with a shudder.

"Well, you must go there," she said firmly. "You must sleep there for one night, and show me that you're not such a coward as you pretend to be."

"Sleep there for a night," he exclaimed piteously. "I couldn't do it, Mona. It would send me off my head."

"It will do you good, Harry. It will act like a tonic on your system. When you've gone through it, you won't be afraid of anything else. It's the first dive into cold water, that's all."

"The first dive sometimes drowns men," he replied. "Oh, Mona, you don't understand—"

"Very well," she said, coldly, "you can please yourself." And she turned round again and looked out of the window. For a few moments there was silence. Then the young man spoke.

"I will do as you wish," he said in a low voice. "Perhaps, as you say, the experience will be good for me. I know I am a fool about these matters. But if anything should happen—"

"Nothing will happen," she interrupted. "If there are ghosts, they can't hurt you."

"If anything should happen," he repeated, "you will, perhaps, be sorry that you sent me to the place. I shall go there at eight o'clock to-night, and leave at eight in the morning. Will that satisfy you?"

"Yes, Harry, that will do."

"Of course, she is right," said Harry Lennox to himself, as he walked home along the dusty road; "but I'd rather spring among the lions for the glove like the fellow did in Leigh Hunt's poem. By-the-by, that chap flung the glove in his lady's face. He was evidently not a gentleman."

At half-past six he rowed himself down the narrow creek, which flowed from the village to the sea. The route lay almost straight through the marshland to the Black House, and was several miles shorter than the journey by road and pathway. The tide was ebbing, and the little craft moved swiftly between the high banks on either side.

The young man had made complete and extensive preparations for his night's adventure. In the bows of the boat there were rugs and a pillow, and a basket containing sandwiches, a bottle of whisky and a syphon of soda-water. In one of his pockets there was a loaded revolver, and in another a box of matches and two candles. He had, moreover, a lantern for the candles, so that the draughts of the ruined house could not extinguish them.

Yet, in spite of all these comforts and protections, he was sick at heart and sorry that he had embarked on the enterprise. He had talked over the matter with a group of fishermen, and they had tried to dissuade him from going to the place. They said that nothing on earth would induce any of them to spend a night in the house, or even to land on the

shore within a mile of it. Had things been seen or heard there? Yes, most certainly. Shrieks and groans had been heard by several men in the village, as they brought their smacks up the creek in the dark, and strange lights had been seen from far out at sea. Old Sam Cullen had caught a glimpse of the man, standing up to his knees in the water. It was a moonlight night, and the red mark across his throat had been plainly visible. And so on, and so on, till Lennox refused to hear any more, and left them.

No wonder that his face was white, as he glided down the creek towards the sea.

The sun had set before he had accomplished half of his journey, and the western sky glowed with crimson flame. There was no wind, and the water was smooth as glass, save for the ripples from the boat's bow and the small eddies stirred up by the oars. Not a blade of grass quivered on the banks, and the stillness seemed to accentuate the solitude of the marshland. There were times when the place had seemed less lonely, when the roar of the wind, and the splash of the waves, and the rustle of the scant herbage had endowed it with life. Now it seemed to Lennox like some dead and forgotten desert, whereon a single explorer moves to death and oblivion.

As he neared the sea, and the crimson light faded from the west, his sense of loneliness increased. He could no longer see the houses of the village. A few sea-gulls showed white against the greyness of sky and sea, but their melancholy cries were not calculated to remove the general impression of gloom and dreariness. The sea itself, a broad mirror of polished steel, seemed lifeless and even suggestive of death. He fancied, when the end of the world came, and the last man stood on the shores of a desolate land, that just such a sea as this would lie before his eyes.

At last he came to the mouth of the creek, and he could see the Black House, a mile to the north of him, standing up dark and gaunt against the grey sky—a dead sentinel watching over a dead land. He looked about for a landing-place. The tide was now far out on the flats, and there was nearly half a mile of sand between the edge of the sea and the shore. It would be impossible to drag the heavy boat all that distance. He would have to land in the creek.

He returned, and running the boat up a narrow gully, climbed on the top of the bank, and looked across the marshland. As far as he could ascertain in the gathering darkness, there were no ditches or other obstacles in his path, and he could proceed by the edge of the water all the way to his destination. He picked up his rugs and other impedimenta, and walked slowly towards the black ruin which was to be his lodging for the night.

And, as he stumbled over the rough ground, the Shape of Fear began to walk by his side. He fancied he could hear footsteps behind him, the patter of soft feet that scarcely brushed aside the glasswort and sea-lavender; he fancied that a dim shape moved in the dark, something that crawled along the ground itself; the silence was full of strange sounds, and the darkness full of images conjured up by his imagination. He quickened his pace to a trot, and, as might have been expected, he tripped over a tuft of weed, and fell heavily forward on his face.

He rose, streaming with perspiration and trembling

in every limb. Then he lit the candle in his lantern, and began to pick up his baggage. As he laid hold of the pillow he gave a cry of terror. The white linen was stained with blood.

"I must be calm," he said to himself, as his teeth chattered with fear. "I must have scratched myself." He looked at his hands, and then passed them over his face and throat and chin. Then he laughed out aloud, and the sound seemed to echo in the silence. There was a crimson stain on his fingers. He remembered that he had cut himself shaving that morning. The cut must have been opened somehow. He dabbed his throat with a handkerchief, and saw that the wound was bleeding very freely. Then he tied the handkerchief round his throat and proceeded on his journey.

The light of the lantern, and the fact that he had discovered a simple explanation of a somewhat terrifying incident, filled him with a certain amount of courage, and he even whistled as he walked along the edge of the shore. But as he neared the Black House, and the grim ruin towered up before him in the gloom, the melody of "Annie Laurie" died away into silence.

He placed his goods on the ground, and went on a tour of inspection round the house. The black tarred walls looked particularly hideous and funereal in the light of the lamp. Some of the windows were shuttered with rough deal boards, but others yawned dark and cavernous. Every pane of glass had long since disappeared, and the empty frames were suggestive of skeletons. He hurried past these as quickly as possible, half expecting to see a lean arm thrust out at him, or a pair of malignant eyes glittering above the window-sill.

He had no difficulty in effecting an entrance, for some intrepid thief had removed the door for firewood, and he found himself in a large hall. The floor was covered with plaster from the ceiling, and various bits of *debris* which the wind had carried through the doorway. The scarlet paper hung in tatters from the mildewed wall, and the jagged strips were not unlike pieces of torn flesh. All the doors had disappeared, and on every side the empty doorways seemed the dark and forbidding entrances to further scenes of gloom and desolation.

Half-way across the hall he paused and listened. As the echo of his footsteps died away there was complete silence. On a windy night there must have been noise enough in those doorless and windowless rooms, and the thunderous roar of the sea must have shaken the rotting plaster from the ceiling. But to-night there was not a sound to be heard, not even the scratching of a mouse, nor the flutter of a bat's wings, nor the ticking of a spider in the wainscotting.

"I will sleep upstairs," he said to himself, and he made his way to the foot of the staircase. The cheap wooden balustrade was cracked and broken, and the deal boards creaked as he placed his foot on them. Everything in the place seemed to be made of the commonest material. There was none of the grandeur of decay, none of the worm-eaten oak and fretted stone of a venerable ruin. The house was only twenty years old, and it was mean and ugly, even in death.

He ascended the stairs, and found himself on a large landing. There were doorways on each side, and at the far end a corridor disappearing into darkness. All the doors were closed. He wondered in which of the rooms the suicide had cut his throat ; he had heard that it was in one of the bedrooms on the first floor, and he had no wish to spend the night in that particular apartment. He walked across the landing and opened the third door on the left.

The room in which he found himself was about 15 ft. square, and though the paper had peeled from the walls, the floor was dry enough. The windows had been boarded up, and looked more cheerful from the inside than if they had been squares of darkness. He set down his rugs, provisions, matches, and candles, and closed the door. There was no key in the lock, but he fashioned some wedges out of a piece of wood, and he hoped they might serve to keep out intruders.

When he had arranged his rugs and pillows so as to form a rough kind of bed, he made a meal off sandwiches and a whisky and soda. Then he lit his pipe and lay down on his couch. He had no intention of going to sleep, and had brought the masterpiece of a well-known humorous writer to occupy his thoughts. But he was tired out by his unwonted exertions, and, in spite of the sparkling wit of the humorist, scarcely ten minutes passed before the book dropped from his fingers, and he was as sound asleep as if he had been in his own comfortable bed.

When he awoke, some three hours later, he found himself in darkness. For a few moments he did not remember where he was ; then, as he realised the truth, he broke out in a cold perspiration. He sat bolt upright, and tried to find the matches, and, as he groped wildly in his pockets and on the floor on either side of him, his terror increased. He fancied that he could hear something, that he could even see something moving in the darkness. His heart beat like a sledge-hammer, and there was a singing in his ears as the blood rushed to his head.

It is impossible for those who have never felt a sudden and unreasoning terror in the darkness to realise the agony that he suffered. He lost all control of himself and screamed aloud. Then he went to and fro on his hands and knees, hunting everywhere on the floor for the lost matches, passing them again and again in his frenzy, until he was in such a state of collapse that he would hardly have known a match-box if he had touched it with his fingers. At last he sank down on the boards from sheer exhaustion, and, as he rolled over on his back, his hand closed on the object of his search.

For a few moments he did not move. The mere feel of the wooden box served to calm his mind. Then he heard a sound, and it seemed to come from the floor below. He struck a match, lit a candle, and listened. The sound continued. Someone was moving about among the *débris* of plaster in the hall. In the stillness of the empty house the noise was loud and definite. It was no fancy of an overwrought brain, no mere rustle or whisper of things unseen. He vowed that, if ever he got out of the place alive, he would think twice before marrying the woman who had forced him into it.

He placed the candle in the lantern, and, mixing himself a strong whisky and soda, drained the glass to the last drop. Then he lay down on the couch, and placed the revolver on the floor by his side. The noise had ceased, and he could hear nothing but the beating of his own heart.

But in a few seconds it began again, and this time he heard the creak of boards and the distinct sound of footsteps. Someone was coming up the stairs, very slowly, pausing now and then, but moving steadily nearer to the landing. He kept his eyes fixed on the door, and wondered if the wedges would hold it. Then he laughed deliriously. He knew that nothing would hold it ; neither bolts, nor locks, nor bars, could keep out the thing that was coming up the stairs.

Now the footsteps were on the landing ; he could distinguish the lighter tread of one who walks on level ground. His heart scarcely seemed to beat as he listened to them. His limbs felt numb and cold. His brain was paralysed with fear. The sound came closer and closer, and paused outside the door.

He clutched the revolver in his nerveless fingers, but seemed unable to raise his hand from the floor. He was like a man in a state of catalepsy, seeing and hearing everything, but powerless to move a limb. The handle of the door turned, and the woodwork seemed to move forward a fraction of an inch. Then a grey mist shrouded the candle-light, and there was darkness.

When he came to his senses, he saw a young woman bending over him. He feebly passed his hands across his eyes, and discovered that his hair and face were dripping with water. He stared at her in a half-dazed fashion.

"Who are you ?" he murmured.

For reply she held out a glass of whisky and soda. He took it from her hand and drank greedily.

"Feel better ?" she queried. "I'm afraid you're soaked. I squirted the syphon at you."

"I'm much obliged," he replied, sitting up and blinking his eyes. "Whom have I the honour—?"

"My name's Cartwright—Violet Cartwright."

"What are you doing here—in this place ?"

"I came to see the ghost. I had heard a lot about it. I am interested in ghosts, but I'm not afraid of them."

"I am," he said, rising to his feet. "And I came here to prove my courage. I have failed."

He felt in his pocket for his handkerchief. Then he remembered that it was still round his neck, and he untied it. The linen was stained with blood.

"I am disappointed in you," she said, looking at the handkerchief. "I thought you were the ghost. As you lay there on the floor, you were just like a dead man with his throat cut. I looked through the keyhole."

"I did it shaving," he said with a nervous laugh. His courage had returned to him now that he had a companion, and he felt a trifle ashamed of himself. Then he looked at the door. One of the hinges had given way, and it hung inwards.

"You must be pretty strong," he said with a smile.

"The woodwork is all rotten," she replied. "I'm

(Continued on page 194)

glad you fainted when you did. You might have fired at me."

He gazed at her in admiration. She was tall and well built, with a handsome, sensible face. She had said nothing to wound his feelings, and he unconsciously compared her to Mona Dixon.

"You are plucky," he said, after a pause. "You must think me a poor sort of creature."

"I'm afraid of cows," she replied with a laugh. "I don't mind ghosts. I am a member of the Psychical Research Society. I thought I'd got hold of a good thing to-night when I saw you lying on the floor. It was a grievous disappointment. Can you spare me some of your food and a drink?"

He hastened to hand her the packet of sandwiches and mix her a whisky and soda. Then he piled up all the rugs and pillows in a heap and pointed to them.

"Please sit down," he said. "I've had my night's rest."

"Thank you," she replied, seating herself on the improvised chair. "I've had a long walk. I came over from Melton. Isn't it jolly having supper here like this? I forgot all about food."

Lennox laughed merrily as he closed the door, and shut out the black square of darkness. The Shadow of Fear passes from weak minds as quickly as it comes over them.

Hour after hour they chatted pleasantly together, first of general subjects, and then, as was naturally to be expected, of themselves. And, when at last the grey dawn filtered through the shuttered window, they seemed more intimate than if they had known each other in the ordinary way for several months.

"I must get back to breakfast," said the girl,

looking at her watch. "It's nearly six o'clock. No chance of the ghost turning up now."

"I must stay here till eight," he replied, gloomily. "I've promised, you know."

"Then I'll stay too," she exclaimed, firmly.

At eight o'clock they passed out together into the sunlight, and went their separate ways.

"I've never heard of such a scandalous thing in all my life," said Mona Dixon, as she listened to the story. "The woman must have been absolutely shameless."

"She was kind," he replied simply. "I had suffered a good deal."

"She's hopelessly compromised," the girl continued in a frigid voice. "No one will ever marry her after she's spent a night alone with a man in that place."

"No one will know of it. I don't suppose she will tell anyone."

"I shall tell them," the girl exclaimed fiercely. "It's right that people should know."

"I would not tell anyone if I were you," he replied quietly. She looked at him angrily, but she did not quite grasp the meaning of his words.

In a week's time the story became public property, and Lennox left for London. Mona Dixon wrote to him twice, but received no answer to her letters.

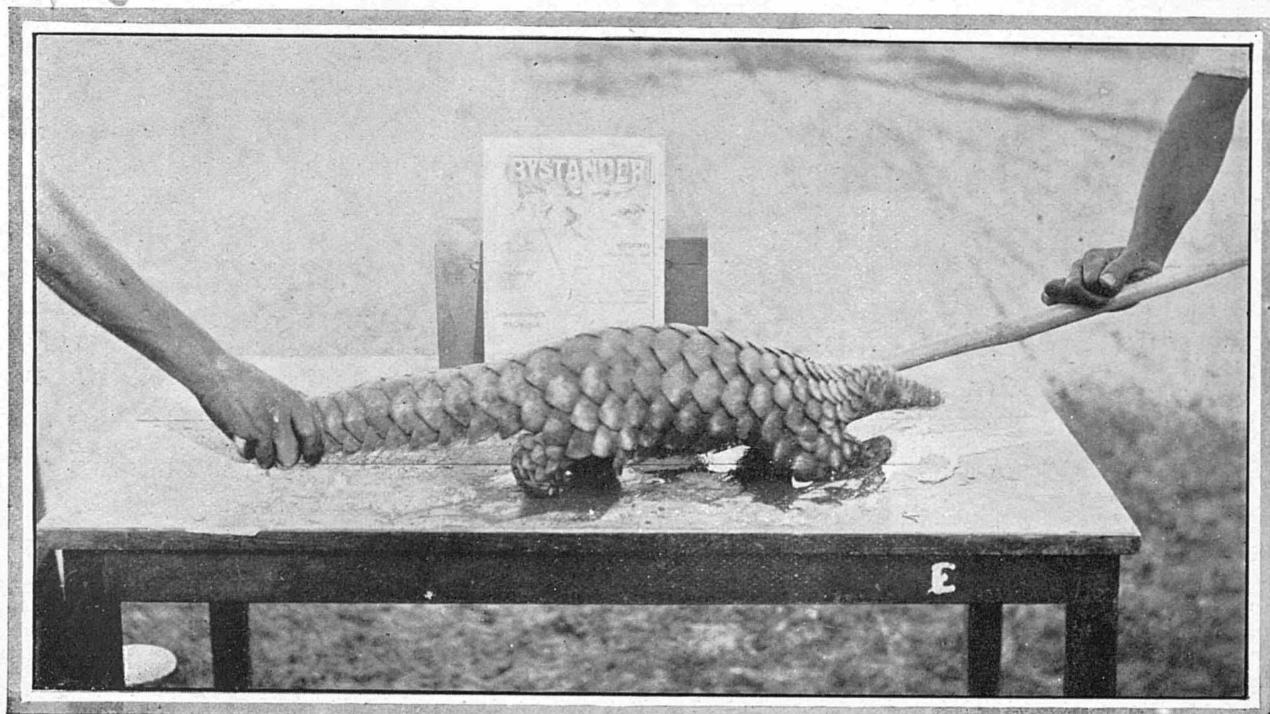
Then, when a month had elapsed, she received the following epistle:—

DEAR MONA,—As I have hopelessly compromised Miss Cartwright, I have offered her the only reparation in my power and she has accepted it. The marriage will take place in three weeks time.—Yours sincerely, HARRY LENNOX.

P.S. — Have you ever read Leigh Hunt's poem about the Glove and the Lions?

J. B. HARRIS-BURLAND.

A CATCH OF THE SEASON



A Curious Creature Caught by a Reader in India

The sender of this photograph, Mrs. Ennis, Masulipatam, South India, writes: "This strange-looking animal was found on the sea-shore in Masulipatam, South India. The natives said they had never seen one before, and it is probably a species of armadillo. It lives upon insects, and though looking quiet enough in the picture, it will be seen that it required two brawny Indian arms to keep it still on the table whilst the photograph was being taken. It has now been sent to the Madras Zoo."

“THE VAMPIRE”

BY V. H. FRIEGLAENDER

THEY purposely missed the first piece. Aubrey explained to Nora at dinner the inadvisability of being in time for it.

“But wouldn’t it be rather amusing,” Nora urged, “to see what sort of a playlet Eustace Pilter could write?”

“My dear Nora!” Aubrey raised delicately astonished eyebrows. “Isn’t it sufficient martyrdom to know the man? Is it conceivable that he should write anything good? And since it must be bad, it would absolutely spoil the evening for me. You do understand that, don’t you?” he asked rather pathetically.

Nora gave in at once. When it became a question of Art and the Artist she always gave in at once. Aubrey was very good and sweet about it, she would have explained, but, of course, they both knew that she could never really understand, and that was rather hard on Aubrey. She wished very much that the artistic temperament were a thing she could acquire by practice, but, since it wasn’t, the least she could do was to give in on occasions like this.

“And I really am rather looking forward to *The Idol* continued Aubrey. “Peterson says it’s the best thing he’s ever seen, and Peterson’s a judge.”

“All right,” said Nora cheerfully; “then we needn’t hurry. Let’s have coffee in the smoking-room.”

“Certainly, if you like,” Aubrey assented. He had a way of seeming to sacrifice his own wishes to those of another whenever, as now, the other proposed doing exactly what he wanted to do himself.

In the smoking-room, Nora glanced at the clock. “There would be time to tell him now,” she thought, and her heart beat faster. “Aubrey—” she began.

“Yes?” He was lighting a cigar. “Oh, half a minute, Nora. I’ve just remembered that letter to Pratt isn’t written. It’s only a line, but it ought to go to-night. What a fag.” He yawned, and just glanced at Nora. For once she did not anticipate his thought. She seemed to be concerned with one of her own.

“I say, I wonder if you’d mind”—his tone was nicely apologetic, but not in the least doubtful. “I’ve been at work all the afternoon, and the thought of a pen makes me groan.”

“Of course, I’ll write it.” Nora extricated herself from her rather inconvenient, and, to do her justice, infrequent mood of not attending, and drew off her glove.

“Thanks awfully; you’re a brick,” he said, as she went to the writing-table. “It’s a shame to get you to do it, but if you wrote”—he smiled apologetically—“you’d know how one gets to hate writing a word that isn’t going to be paid for—going to be counted, like Saul’s and David’s Philistines, so to speak, in its thousands and ten thousands, you know.”

“What rubbish!” Nora said, indignantly. “You’re not a bit like that. You simply put it that way, instead of saying that your hand aches horribly.”

It was really only at this point that Aubrey remembered this particular afternoon’s work had consisted in reading *The Nineteenth Century* with a view to getting a possible idea for himself out of it. Nora was writing the note to Pratt; if he interrupted her to explain, she would not have time to finish it. Besides, he had a right to Nora’s sympathy. There were other afternoons on which he had worked. He sat back in his chair.

“Finished!” Nora said.

“And we ought to start,” he suggested. “Oh, but weren’t you just going to tell me something? I’m awfully sorry; I’m afraid my stupid letter interrupted. What was it?”

Nora had her back to him. She was fastening the envelope, and her hand trembled a little. Oh, she must tell him at her own time, and in her own way—after the theatre would be a good chance, very likely—and, meanwhile, there must not be any mysteries, any questions or half answers, as though—as though it were an ordinary subject.

“Was I?” she said. “I’ve forgotten. Oh, Aubrey, could you fasten this last button?”

At the theatre they had a few minutes to spare; the first piece was only just over. Aubrey turned the leaves of the programme. There were photographs of the six actors and actresses who formed the caste, and a full length portrait of the author. A little thrill of surprise shot through him. She was a girl; it was not her sex, however, that took him by surprise, but her youth. A sound escaped him.

“Why, look, Nora! This girl—this child is the author. It’s incredible. Why, the—the infant has written two plays before this one, hasn’t she? Both successes, too. She must have begun in her cradle.” He was conscious of, but at a loss to account for, the sudden wave of antagonism that swept over him.

“She is young,” Nora agreed wonderingly. “How clever she must be.”

He was silent. With the instinct of the writer he was analysing his feelings. What was this stab of fierce enmity? The curtain rose before he found out.

At the end of the first act he turned to Nora with kindling eyes. “It’s fine, isn’t it?” he said, in a burst of enthusiasm. “The real thing. I didn’t see how she was going to do it—she’s so young and all that—but it’s marvellously simple. These six people are people everybody knows; she’d only got to sit in her mother’s drawing-room long enough, and they’d all have called.” Again he was conscious of that mental pang. He recognised it now; it was simply jealousy. He felt like a man who, walking towards a prize, sees another running past him, and for the first time realises that it is possible to run. All his life Aubrey had walked; there was no necessity to write for money, and he had written only in certain cherished moods, written slowly, and carefully, and little, hoarding his forces, husbanding his strength. And the result?—the punishment, rather, as he now suddenly saw it?

(Continued from page 548)

The cherished moods had come more rarely, had, indeed, of late, come hardly at all. A sudden panic seized him. He must catch up. This girl was running—running all the time, and he was still walking. Swiftly, as though in reward, panic died before another mood, the cherished mood he had missed so long. At the final fall of the curtain he was in a kind of rapture of anticipation. He caught his breath at the rush and swirl of ideas, and his eyes smiled into Nora's. He was going to do better than his best; he could feel it; he must tell someone.

"It's—it's literary oxygen, that play," he said with a laugh, as they drove home. "To-morrow I shall work—heavens!—as I haven't worked for months. A play, Nora! Why on earth haven't I ever wanted to write a play before?" He laughed again light-heartedly. "Oh, it's a heavenly feeling! Don't you know it?"

She looked at him rather wistfully. "Tell me," she said.

He slipped his arm through hers. "Oh, you must know! Suddenly there's an exaltation and a glory; the sun and the moon and the stars bowing down before you, you know; your limitations roll away like clouds, and—" he smiled. "While it lasts," he added rather ruefully.

Nora said nothing; she was afraid of saying the wrong thing—she had so often said it.

He sighed suddenly, and the arm in hers stiffened. He did not draw it away, but the effect was the same. She felt the sting of tears in her eyes, and she could not speak. Yet she had wanted so badly to tell him! Surely the sun and the moon and the stars might have waited till to-morrow. Then she almost laughed, and her hand half sought his. But he spoke first.

"By the way," he said, distantly, chilled by her silence, "I shall want to get to work early. You might see that the servants don't sing hymns for once, will you? And for goodness sake don't let them turn out the room over my head again. I believe they do it every day."

Nora's lips quivered. Too frequently the artistic temperament makes its presence chiefly felt by means of the artistic temper.

"All right," she said gently, "I'll see to it. You know, I *do* tell them, Aubrey; but servants are so thoughtless; they have to be constantly reminded."

He nodded, and then relapsed into silence. Nora was indignant with herself for not having responded to his earlier mood.

"Have you got an idea already?" she ventured, after a while.

He started. "Oh, I don't know! At least, I mean yes, but it's all vague and shadowy yet. I'm not sure of it; I'm only reaching out. Anything might drive it away—it's that that makes me so desperate. Afterwards, when once it gets into swing, it will be different."

"I see," Nora said, softly, and leaned back in her seat. Then it was a good thing, she thought, that she had not told him after dinner. It would certainly worry him, and she could quite well wait a week or two till the play got "into swing." There was time enough.

Still, there was just one point she might touch on without worrying him. She found she wanted rather keenly to have it settled.

"Do you work best at home or away, Aubrey?" she asked.

He turned to her in astonishment. They were at home now, in the hall.

"Nora! What a question! At home, of course. Why?"

"Oh, nothing," she said, and began to mount the stairs. The sudden violence of her feelings alarmed her. She felt a hatred of the high, dark London house, and a wild longing for green meadows, mountain streams, stretches of blue sea—anything that was not grey and brown and black like London.

"Away from home?" His tone was puzzled. "Why, Nora, you can't have thought it possible. How can one write in hotels or *pensions* or seaside cottages?"

"No, of course not," Nora said hurriedly, turning at the landing. For an unguarded instant she let him see her eyes.

"Ah! I see," he said, and his own clouded. "You mean *you* want to go away?"

"No, no! I mean—oh, Aubrey, it's nothing. You know I always feel like that in Spring."

"I wish you'd say straight out what you want, Nora." His tone was faintly injured. "You treat me as though I never tried to do what you like."

"Oh!" she said reproachfully. "You know I don't think that."

"Well, but if you want to go abroad or anything," he persisted fretfully, "by all means let us go. Only for goodness sake don't talk of my working away from home. It must be one thing or the other. When do you want to start?"

"Oh, dearest," she entreated rapidly, "don't speak of it again. Of course, *of course* you must be where you can work best. It was only the selfish idea of a moment. And we—we can go when the play is finished, can't we?"

"Why, of course!" His face brightened. "Just what I should like myself. And if only I can get the situations settled and the acts mapped out the rest will be easy. You know dialogue is my strong point."

"Yes, of course. How—how long do you suppose the other part will take?"

"Oh, one can't be bound down to a day. But I shall work hard while the idea is red-hot, and if you can keep people from worrying me you'll see how I get on." He bounded after her three stairs at a time, and kissed her. Then, for a moment, he held her chin up. "Why are you so white, sweetheart? Headache?"

She flushed rosily. "The theatre was hot. I'm all right."

He nodded, satisfied. "Heavens! I'm in a hurry to get to work," he exclaimed buoyantly. "Come along to bed. Not that I expect to sleep a wink in this state of mind."

But, after all, it was not he who lay awake.

"The situations," he said gleefully a fortnight later, "are all straightened out, and I see my way gloriously. I'm just going for a walk. Don't let them let my fire out."

Nora nodded. "Oh, Aubrey, how jolly!" Her glance wandered involuntarily to the window, and he paused abruptly. A little furrow of thought appeared between his eyes. "Oh—and I say, Nora, are you

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still so keen to get away at once? Because I'm half afraid—well, you know, I've got to be jolly careful with the dialogue. In a play, you see, every sentence has to tell—has to be another candle lighting up someone's character. And it wants doing, that."

"Yes, I see."

"Still, of course, I promised; and if you want to go—" he paused, expectantly.

"No, no; it's all right," she said hurriedly. "It will be better for the play to be finished first; I quite see. And, after all, it won't be long now, will it?"

"No—I don't suppose so. Only"—his fingers drummed the table rather impatiently—"it's—it's a little worrying to be hurried, you know."

She flushed. "Dearest, I'm not hurrying you! Indeed, I wouldn't."

"No, I know." He walked up and down restlessly. "But you're longing to go, and looking white and run down, and naturally that worries me. And—and I'm doing the best I can. No one can do more. Couldn't you take a little more exercise or something just for these few weeks? At present, you see, I feel rather as though you were timing me with a stop-watch." He laughed a little apologetically, and stopped as he reached her chair. "Oh, am I being brutal, Nora? If you feel I'm asking too much of you, tell me, and I'll throw up the play at once, and come."

She had an almost overwhelming longing to tell him at last, but she crushed it back. He must not be worried, or the play would suffer. And she could not be so selfish. There was still time; the play would be finished in time.

"No, no!" she said. "Of course, you shan't do that."

But later she grew afraid. The play was not finished, and Aubrey was unconscious, absorbed in his work. Week after week went by, and at last she acted.

"Aubrey," she said, one day, "I think, if you don't mind, I'll go down to my old nurse in the country till you're ready to go abroad. London seems to have—got on my nerves."

He looked amazed.

"It shan't interfere with your work," she said, quickly. "I've asked Aunt Laura, and she says she'll come and keep house for you."

"I think," he said coldly, "you might have consulted me first. If you're ill, I shall come—"

"Oh, no, not ill," she broke in; "only a little run down. And—and I don't want to get ill; that would be such a worry for you, and you wouldn't be able to work. So I thought I'd take it in time; and as soon as the play's finished you'll come for me, won't you?"

"Of course," he said. "Only you must make allowances, Nora. Aunt Laura won't be an unmixed blessing; she doesn't know our ways or anything, and I expect I shan't be able to work so quickly. But still, you know I'll do my best."

Nora steeled herself before his tone of patient resignation, but it was hard. She longed to give in.

"Oh, I know, I know!" she said, wistfully. She lingered a minute, but he did not look up.

"It's natural," she told herself, as she shut the door softly behind her. "Of course it looks as though I were indifferent—inconsiderate—selfish even." A little smile parted her lips. "But when he knows—!" She remembered happily, and was comforted.

Aubrey was right; Aunt Laura interfered rather seriously with his work. When people demanded to see him, she let them; the servants banged doors and sang hymns entirely unrestrained; she herself frequently talked in her ordinary voice to people in the hall, and even immediately outside his door. Still, the play did progress—was finally finished. On the day that he posted it to the Regal Theatre he wrote and told Nora.

And Nora, with a sigh that was half a sob and half a laugh, and entirely a thanksgiving, answered it. At last she told him.

But there was only one outgoing post a day, and it had gone. Her letter waited on the hall table. And the next morning's post brought a second letter from Aubrey, a few hurried, delighted lines. What did she think? The most unheard of good luck. His play had been, so to speak, the straw at which the drowning "Regal" had clutched. Not only was it accepted, but it was to be put into immediate rehearsal to replace the second of two dead failures. Everybody connected with the play was going to be worked to death, himself, perhaps, most of all. But it was to be produced in two or three weeks, and he would only wait for the first night. After that he was coming straight down to take her away. Was she better? Ever hers, Aubrey.

Nora's hand shook a little as she put the note back in its envelope. Then she fetched her own letter from the hall table and burnt it carefully.

Aubrey held out his hand eagerly as a maid came in with a pile of morning papers.

"Thanks," he said. "I shall want a hansom"—he glanced at the clock—"in half an hour. To catch the 10.22 from Victoria." He opened the first paper nervously. Last night—well, last night the play had been a success, but then, this was morning, and you never knew what the papers would say.

But it was all right. He glanced rapidly through the pile, catching only a word or phrase in each—just enough to know whether it were praise or blame. And it was nearly all praise; *The Vampire* was good.

He turned back to the first paper for a more careful reading. How glad Nora would be. He would take all the papers down with him and read them to her in the garden. Then he smiled. What an absurdity! As if Nora would not have ordered them all days ago, and be devouring them at this very minute, just as he was.

"... The author of *The Vampire* has not made the mistake of laying on the characters of his creations with a trowel. They are not caricatures, but portraits. The foolish, indulgent, weak mother, the ambitious father, the three daughters—they are all real people. But it is in the Vampire himself, the only son, that the author reaches high-water mark. He is subtly and finely treated, 'and so real that he hurts,' to borrow a remark overheard between the acts. His selfishness, colossal though it is, is unconscious. With perfect amiability, without a hint of misgiving, he demands his daily food—the life-blood of his family. His father's money, his mother's time and influence, the youth, the hope, the health, even the loves of his sisters are, in turn, sacrificed to him. When at last his youngest sister, the only one who sees him as he really

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is, tells him the truth about himself, we rejoice. Now at last he will suffer as he has made others suffer. But does he? It is a question that adds not a little to the fascination of the play. Does the Vampire ever see himself as the audience sees him? We had reached the point where we were on the brink of knowing, and then—the curtain fell."

Aubrey threw the paper down and picked up the next.

"Last night at the Regal Theatre——"

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in," said Aubrey, impatiently. "Hullo! Peterson!" he exclaimed in surprise. "Are you taking a holiday?"

Peterson shut the door carefully, and came forward. There was something odd in his manner, Aubrey noticed suddenly. He wondered again why Peterson had left his practice in the country to take care of itself.

"How's Nora?" he asked. "You've been looking after her a bit, haven't you? Is she pretty fit again?"

Peterson turned away suddenly. "We—we didn't know it would be so soon, Hurst," he said, rather hoarsely, "or, of course, I'd have insisted on your being sent for. But—but the suggestion seemed to worry her so; she wanted you to get through with your play first. I gave in; I thought there was time."

"Time for what?" Aubrey asked in a puzzled way.

Peterson took some seconds to find his voice.

"They—haven't pulled through, Hurst."

"Pulled through? Who?"

Peterson turned desperately. "Your wife and child."

Aubrey stared at him, and his eyes were suddenly wide with panic. "Nora?" he said, sharply. "Peterson! For Heaven's sake! Nora isn't——?"

Peterson bent his head. "At two this morning. We never dreamed—and we knew you were coming to-day. Anyway, we couldn't have let you know in time."

Aubrey's eyes never left his face.

"I—I did my best, Hurst," he said, miserably. "Nothing could have saved her."

Aubrey's lips framed a word; Peterson guessed at it.

"The child never lived," he said.

"No, no!" Aubrey frowned. "Nora! Didn't she—what did she say of me before——?"

Peterson's eyes were compassionate. "She didn't know," he said gently; "she—she was wandering a little, talking of all sorts of trivialities——"

"What sort?" Aubrey asked, sharply.

"Oh, she thought she was at home, you know. Little everyday things — telling servants not to bang doors, and visitors that you were busy. Only scraps like that. You see, Hurst, she had been rather foolish. She ought to have told you at the beginning, and not overtaxed her strength as she did. But I suppose she didn't realise it, and she was so anxious you shouldn't be worried. And, at the end, it was those little things from the first months that came back to her."

Aubrey's head sank to his arms on the table. Peterson watched him helplessly. What could he do?

Suddenly, with an impatient movement, Aubrey swept away the paper on which his arms had been resting. It fell with half a dozen others to the floor. Mechanically, Peterson picked them up. His eyes rested on the first one.

"Does the Vampire ever see himself as——?"

"*The Vampire*" he remembered. "Of course, that's the name of his play. So he was reading the notices when I came." He glanced hastily at the two or three paragraphs he could see without rustling the pages. "Going to make a stir, too." His eyes fell to Aubrey's bowed head. "Poor devil! What confounded hard luck!" he thought.

He touched Aubrey's arm gently. "We can just catch the 10.22," he said.

Aubrey raised his head. There was something in his expression that made his friend pause expectantly.

"Yes?" he said involuntarily.

Aubrey's eyes travelled to the clock. "Yes, we can just catch the 10.22," he repeated.

V. H. FRIEDLAENDER.

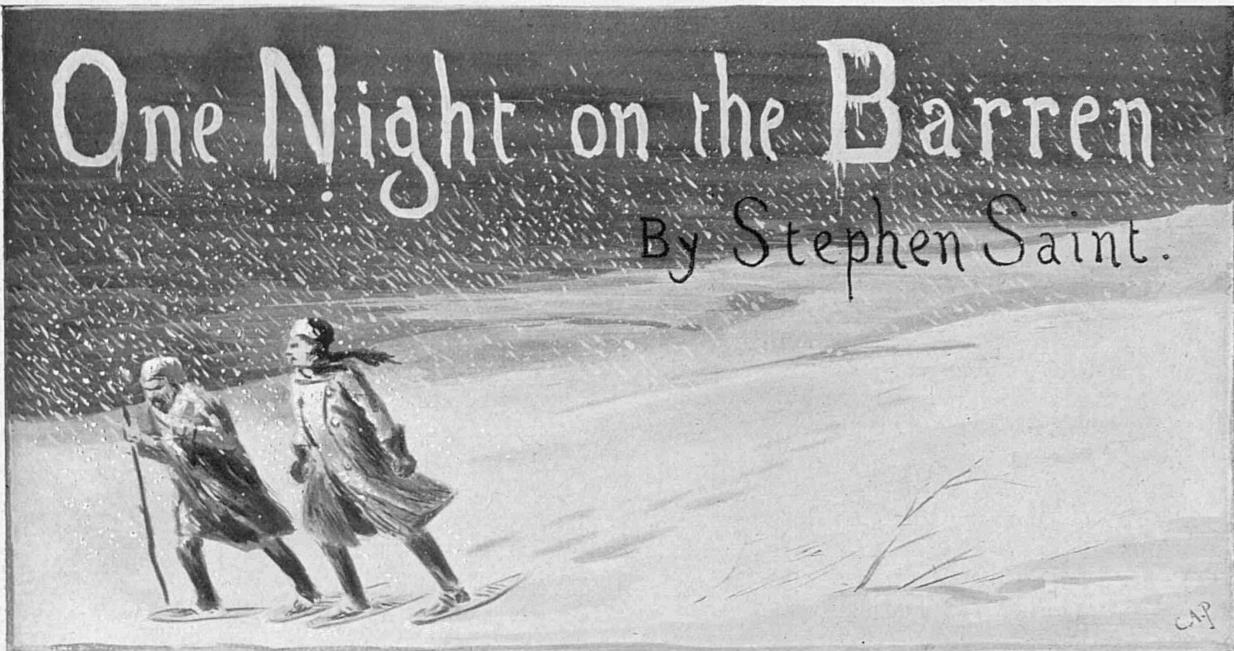
"THE TALE OF A TAIL LIGHT"



Photo

A. Gordon Smith

A STORY WITHOUT WORDS



FOR some time the train had run slowly and jerkily. Sometimes it stopped altogether, and only resumed the journey after a lot of talking and shovelling. At least that was the impression conveyed to the train's handful of passengers.

Snow streamed down like grain from a burst bag. The wind was soft but deadly cold, and the night was black. It was odd to look from the window of a carriage and see white flakes spat from out a bottomless black cauldron. The few passengers were even-tempered. They had expected this sort of journey before they started. They were all well wrapped and seemed warm enough, lying full length on the thick-cushioned seats.

There were no women on the train. Its population averaged a man a carriage. Rarely were there two together. On such a night and on such a journey one would have imagined companionship to be the most desirable thing on earth. But nowhere did two men sit close together. Where two occupied the same carriage, they sat as far as possible apart and rarely spoke a word. A child would have labelled them British or of British descent. Amazing, the Anglo-Saxon temperament!

The train had stopped once more, with an ominous jerk suggesting that it had run into a very substantial obstacle. More talking from the black and white night, an oath or two. One passenger peered out of his window. Again the sound of spades.

They toiled, those plucky railway men, for half an hour, but their previous energies had taken the life out of them. They gave it up. It had been five minutes' shovelling and a minute's warming of the hands on the engine-plates every five miles of the last sixty. Their wills were strong, but their bodies were beat.

Two men with lanterns walked down either side of the train. They opened the doors of the lighted carriages and broke the unpleasant news to the passengers.

"Snowed-up—finally. Goin' to walk or stop? Better stop. God knows where we are."

"Oh, hell, can't we help dig?"

"It's like carvin' marble, boss. Snow all froze. Got a mouthful of whisky?"

The passenger gave the railwayman, whose face was stung red, his flask. One careful mouthful was absorbed with much lip-licking as a sequel. Then the railwayman went on, to shock other passengers, and possibly earn more mouthfuls.

Half an hour passed by. The white train promised to be buried very shortly. Most of the passengers slept, but two were very much awake.

They occupied adjoining carriages, and both were young, roughly but usefully dressed. Both sat at the window gazing angrily and disgustedly out at the streaming snow. Suddenly one seemed to come to a decision. He jumped to his feet, and taking a bag off the rack took out a pair of snow-shoes. These he rapidly strapped on. Then on the seat he spread out the contents of his bag. One by one he rejected everything, save a flask and a packet of sandwiches. Back went the rest in the bag, and the bag under the seat. Buttoning his great coat round his neck and pulling down a big ear-flapped cap, he opened the carriage door.

Before him lay a thousand miles of soft, white silence.

He slid on to the snow and glanced up and down the train. The man at the window of the next carriage stared at him curiously. Who was this fool, pluckier than he? Where in heaven's name was he going to track?

Then the man outside showed his face in the pool of light made by the carriage lamps. The man inside jumped as if he had been stung. He wrenched down the window.

"Jim McAllister!"

"Ay! Who's takin' tickets?"

"Jim McAllister!"

"I seem to know your voice," said the man outside, "but I can't see your face. Twist your head a bit."

"Jim McAllister, you're up sides with Dave Arkwright."

"By ——" McAllister's face grew ugly; then a slightly amused expression crossed it.

"I might have guessed you were on these trucks. Well, well!"

"You're goin' back, McAllister?"

"To-morrow's the day."

"Curse you, I hoped you were dead."

"And I never paid you the compliment of thinking of you, Arkwright. Still, I sort of guessed you'd be in at the death."

"And you're goin' ahead now?"

"I guess so. I want my baby."

"You lying dog, it's mine."

"Well, well! we'll know to-morrow."

"Are you goin' to play fair?"

"Aye, no shootin'; the boys'll see to that."

"Sure. I'm with you there."

"You're going to death now. God knows where we are."

"You've a bad memory then, and worse eyesight."

"Sure. Yours was always mighty good."

"It'll see you to hell, Arkwright, you sneering devil."

"Bad night for a fifty-mile stroll, McAllister."

"Eighty, you fool. Seventy, south-west to Three Forks, and ten from there, keeping along the river, I guess."

"Thanks. I'd lost my bearings."

McAllister swore under his breath. He had not intended to give his bitterest enemy the information he most desired in all the world at the moment. But the deed was done now. McAllister would have a companion on that big eighty-mile slide.

He sat down on the high step of the carriage, knee deep in snow. Arkwright busied himself strapping on snow-shoes and sorting things from his bag just as McAllister had done.

It was an odd meeting for two deadly enemies, but somehow both had expected it. The next day was the 27th of November, and, five years back, the two men had pledged themselves to make good on that date in the eyes of the stern, hard livers at Ottanoon.

When a man, a poor hand at spinning a yarn anyway, sets out to make a story for a paper and gets telling the truth, people are apt to smile. If he labels it as the truth, people nearly die laughing. That's why, whenever the story of Dave Arkwright and Jim McAllister is told, the historian is wise to state beforehand that he's indulging in pure fiction. Then nobody's disappointed and nobody laughs. Good God! Nobody laughs!

They had lived, young fellows of twenty-four and twenty-five, in a lumbermen's camp. They were splendid, strong, and clean, these two. But on a bad, bad day came the little woman. Whence or exactly when the camp did not know. She was found about.

Men at Ottanoon used just to stare at her. They gave her food and a dead man's shack sheltered her. She, on her part, did useful things of the feminine sort for the men who were not too ashamed to be helped by a woman. No one loved her. The normal sexual instincts slept at Ottanoon.

With Arkwright and McAllister it was slightly different. They were the youngest and rawest of the hands in the camp. They were new enough to remember women and the sweetness and comfort of them. This little one was ugly, but they got to look at her tenderly. This was in winter.

In the spring, McAllister and Arkwright got quarrelling about the little woman. She smiled at both and encouraged both. Of course, they should have killed her or both gone away. But when man is at war with his fellow and a woman's the prize, he fights to the bitter end. The two young men grew to loathe each other, and the wicked little woman fanned their fury. Each had their turn of her particular favour, and so got tied tighter and tighter in a web of hate.

The camp grunted over it all, until it got about that Ottanoon was to have a baby, its first. The camp looked at Arkwright and then at McAllister. Both young men seemed happy.

"In October I take her up the river to Three Forks," said McAllister, with an absurd smile.

"Another month or two, and I guess I'll find her a home in the Settlements," said Arkwright, grinning paternally.

More than ever did the camp scratch its head.

The little woman still smiled at both and lived rather luxuriously. The weeks rolled by, and then it got about that McAllister was making preparations for an up-river trip. On the strength of the rumour Arkwright fought him, and it was well understood by both from that day that any external display of paternal rights by either would mean shooting.

That was unlucky for the little woman. When the backwoods were brown and green and gold she took to her bed in the shack. The babe was born, but three weeks later the woman died.

On the night of her death, in the big cabin where the lumbermen slept, the sin of Arkwright and McAllister was considered. In the end a verdict of manslaughter was brought in against both of them. It was considered that they might fairly plead extenuating circumstances in view of their youth and inexperience. But out of the camp they would have to go. The camp was too small for two men at war. Now, before the cruel winter set in, they must go.

Both pleaded hard for the baby boy. But the camp was wise and just. No one knew to whom the baby belonged. Arkwright did not know. McAllister did not know. Nor had the woman known. The sagacious verdict was to the effect that after a lapse of five years the two men might return to Ottanoon camp; and the camp, with all fairness, and, it was hoped, with the aid of Dame Nature, would say to whom the child most probably belonged.

The men could expect no more; but they left the camp with hearts blackened with hate of each other, hate that grew as year by year they learnt that the boy thrived, and was a son that any man might be proud of. Now, after five years, they re-met. To-morrow it should be decided to whom belonged the bonny son of the wicked little woman.

Arkwright had strapped on his shoes, and stood beside McAllister in the snow.

"Ready?"

"Aye!"

They slid away in a south-westerly direction. At first the going was easy, even pleasant. They were never warm, so bitter was the night, but the wind was still soft. The pouring snow made their clothes heavy, but travelling in snow-shoes is not tiring to the expert.

For ten miles neither spoke. Both occasionally pulled at their flasks, whenever the cold induced the

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terrible numb feeling the backwoodsman knows so well. Then Arkwright broke a strap of his left shoe. McAllister laughed jeeringly, and slid away into the dark. Curses followed him. In five minutes Arkwright had the shoe mended, and sped away on the other's blurred trail.

An hour later they were again level, both travelling much slower. McAllister's flask was empty. Arkwright had but one mouthful left. The snow seemed to grow softer, more treacherous. The wind had not been strong enough to pack it down. The work became so hard that presently both men were drenched with sweat. They stumbled and stumbled, kept stopping. When they stopped the sweat froze.

When two men are alone on the barren it is difficult for them long to remain enemies. But fifty years of lonely life on an ocean rock would have found these two as far apart in the end as in the beginning. As the cold reached their brains, their hate grew more intense. Both knew what an awful enemy the Wild was to them that night. But in comparison to each other, they loved the Wild.

"By ——, it's damned cold," at last said McAllister.

Arkwright swung on. He had an awful ache in his teeth.

"Got any whisky left?"

"One mouthful—for myself, you dog."

McAllister snarled and went on, furiously, bending low.

A buried tree, invisible in the dark, flung them both down. They got up lazily. The snow, when you fall deep in it, is warm.

They knew they were going right, and this just tempted them forward. So far they had not been bothered with the wind. Both men were mentally congratulating themselves on the favourable elements when something happened which made them glance at each other with sudden alarm.

The wind was stiffening. It began to whine, to whip the snow into their faces. The black clouds above were hurrying. Both men swallowed something. They knew. The blizzard was on them.

Lower they bent. The cold was awful, freezing their breath. Like snails they progressed. Arkwright swallowed his last drop of whisky. Could they win out?

Now they were side by side, staggering, floundering, ice on the heart. They touched their ears, their noses. They could not feel them. Violently they swung their arms, sliding on, knee to knee, as cavalry ride.

Then the swinging hand of McAllister touched the swinging hand of Arkwright. Each whipped his hand away from the hated touch. Onward, knee to knee.

Again their hands touch, tremble together. The union is warm, even here, out on the bleak, snarling barren, warm. Their hands link, but their eyes do not meet. Knee to knee, onward!

As two lovers, hand in hand. A deadly grip, fingers that feel like teeth, but warmer, warmer. Thank God for the warmth of the hand of the enemy. Keener and keener the knife edge of the wind.

One man groans. His muscles are freezing. He falls, bringing the other with him. They strive to wring their hands apart. They are frozen firm.

Arkwright is on his feet first and wrenches himself away. McAllister howls curses after him. He is going, the hateful enemy with the warm hand. But

the snow is warmer, warmer. Oh, the everlasting bliss of just giving up. But there is Ottanoon ahead, Ottanoon and my baby, my baby. Not, if God cares, for that hound ahead.

McAllister is afoot again. In fifteen minutes the enemy, floundering in the snow, is overtaken. McAllister's turn to jeer. He is ahead!

Ahead! Ahead! An hour has gone and no sign of Arkwright. He sings to himself, but his mouth moves jerkily, as if the jaws were frozen. Damn the enemy! Why isn't he here with his warm hand? Thicker streams the snow and fiercer blows the wind. McAllister at last is really worried. His woodman's craft avails him nothing in this storm. He is probably lost. He must find shelter. That is the only hope. The forest, or, at any rate, the shelter of trees.

There should be trees to the right, that is if he has not blundered already. He turns at right angles, and drags himself wearily over the snow. Now he strikes another trail, recent, too, of snow-shoes. Arkwright hasn't given in, then. He has started for shelter earlier.

In a few minutes the enemies are together again. At once their hands link. They stumble together. Their bodies touch. There is something in being together. Mile after mile they swing along, always hoping for the trees. Often they fall, and each time it is harder to rise. Once, for a few minutes, they snuggle together as they lie in the snow, and the underman is very difficult to shake off.

"Keep close to me; closer, closer!" That is the cry as they go. The cold has driven out their manhood.

No sign of the trees! They are, perhaps, travelling in a circle. But they cannot guess how far and how long they have travelled. Both are dazed and nearly blind. Their eyelids are stiff and horribly heavy.

At times one man is so close to his fellow as to incommodate him. A weak blow is struck, but the stumbling bodies, somehow, move together again. Oh! to lie down, to burrow as the partridges burrow, and to have warmth and peace. Oh, God, if they dared!

Together they fall, Arkwright on top. As he tries to raise himself, his cheek rests on McAllister's cheek. Unconsciously he lets it rest there. Flesh to flesh. There is warmth. Then he remembers, and again tries to rise. He cannot.

"Breathe on me, for God's sake. I'm dying. My lungs are ice."

"Breathe on me!"

"Press tighter, for God's sake. Slip your arm round—here."

"We're fools. Oh, we're fools! This means death. Get up, get up!"

"Oh! hell, I can't. Let's die."

"The kid, the kid, I'm going for my kid."

Arkwright tries again to struggle up. He cannot. The other's arms are fast round him.

Tightly they cling, face on face. The blood seems to course again. They are deep in the snow, out of the wind. They are resting. The snow burns and the linked bodies glow. Thank God, this is peace.

And Jim McAllister and David Arkwright were never seen again till the spring sun melted the snow of the Barren; and the passing vireos wheeled away from the terrible sight of two long-dead men tightly linked in vice-like embrace.

STEPHEN SAINT.

The "Bystander" Series of Short Stories



IN the bedroom of a small flat in Chelsea a woman lay dying. It was five o'clock on an October afternoon, and the shadows lengthened as the sun went down beyond the river, throwing fantastic patterns on the walls. On the top of the wardrobe near the bed someone had put a long cardboard box, and in the waning light the shadow it threw over the dying woman resembled a coffin. By the bedside sat a man with bowed head, his lips firmly set in that depth of pain which is unable to find an outlet in any expression of sorrow. He was a big, finely built man, with tender eyes and powerful hands, which were lying inertly in front of him.

From the room beyond came the feeble cry of a child born a few hours before. The doctor had just left the house, and the man had dismissed the nurse from the room, for there was nothing more for her to do. The dying woman was sinking out of life into the torpor of death almost imperceptibly. Her face was beautiful, but painfully thin, and shadowed by her dark hair and the long lashes that swept her cheeks.

Her almost bloodless-looking hands lay outside the bed on the white coverlet. The man thought she moved one of them, and closed his own large hand over hers. In an ecstasy of concentrated eagerness he leant his dark head close to hers on the pillow as if to listen to any words that might breathe the last wish of the dying.

"Darling, darling, speak," he cried in a hoarse, agonised whisper. But her voice was inaudible, only her lips seemed to him to move, and he thought she said "golden hair." He walked across the room and opened the door.

"Bring baby, quickly," he cried.

A nurse came forward with a tiny bundle.

"I will take him," he said.

The nurse was about to object, but saw the look on his face and let the babe go. The man lifted it with the tenderness of a woman, and went across to the bedside, laying it down by its mother.

"Yes, golden hair," he said softly, and guided the nerveless hand on to the tiny downy head of the infant; "golden hair like mine used to be, and yours, too, when you were a little girl—only yours was paler and softer. Your mother gave me a curl, you know, long, long ago. Feel our baby's hair, darling—darling—"

His voice broke away into a sob.

It might have been a smile of exquisite happiness

THE ALPHABET

OF HELL

By FRASER HILL

that passed over the face of the woman. It was hard to say, so fleeting was the look that sped her on the road to Eternity.

Fate had dealt hardly with Rudolph Hastings. He had gone out to the Argentine to take up some work which it was supposed would bring him fame and fortune. But he had found, with many others, that what seemed a fair enough prospect from afar was very different in reality. His firm failed, and he looked for fresh occupation in vain. He had no private income, and was obliged to send his wife back to England with shattered health to support herself as best she could. She succeeded in making a slender income by journalism, and Rudolph Hastings found her slowly progressing in her work when he returned after three years spent in futile efforts in search of the fortune which had never been realised.

But the wheel of fate had indeed turned at last in his favour, and he came back to England to take up an important billet with Kenyon and Braithwaite, which everyone knows is one of the richest firms in the Argentine. The amazingly good offer of the position had been made by the firm's manager at Buenos Ayres, and Rudolph Hastings knew that at last his career was practically assured.

His wife had always been a delicate woman, but Rudolph was amazed at the change which had come upon her in his absence. She was indeed more beautiful than ever, but she daily grew so frail and white that Rudolph began to realise that his good fortune had come too late. A strange apathy seemed to have taken possession of her, and Rudolph believed that the years of struggle and separation had broken her heart. She spoke without bitterness of the past, but she showed no enthusiasm over the future. She would sit for hours in silence gazing out of the window overlooking the Embankment, and when roused by her husband's voice would turn on him a gaze of unutterable tenderness which he could not understand, and which filled him with strange forebodings of misfortune.

He was anxious to take her abroad for a time in search of health, but she resolutely refused to go, and he had to be content to devote all his leisure time to the fruitless task of nursing her back to strength and vitality. She would not even consent to leave the little flat she had furnished in her husband's long absence, so it was here her first child was born, prematurely, and at the price of her own life, in surroundings which were far less luxurious than Rudolph Hastings's now handsome income warranted.

Two more years went by, and the golden-haired

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baby boy which his wife had left behind became the one absorbing passion of Rudolph Hastings's life. Rudolph still stayed on at the little flat. He could not bear to have anything changed, and the rooms remained as his wife had herself arranged them. The bitterness of life had entered into his soul, and the memory of the dead haunted him continually. Regret for the wasted years and the misery she had endured had eaten into the very core of his heart, and only the baby's laughter could change the look of intense sorrow in his face. The baby grew strong and healthy, and no greater contrast could be imagined than the red-cheeked, laughing boy presented to the dark-haired, white-faced woman who had given him birth.

A change had come to the firm of Kenyon and Braithwaite. Old Kenyon had died suddenly, and his immense wealth passed to his only son, young George Kenyon, who at the time of his father's death was yachting in the Pacific with his bride. Rudolph had never yet seen him, for old Kenyon guarded the secrets of the firm jealously from his heir, and kept him out of the business, with that short-sighted policy which has proved fatal to many less wealthy financial concerns. Rudolph himself had little to fear from any change of management. Owing to his abilities his position had become assured to him, and young Kenyon was said to be indifferent to anything concerning the firm except the income which it produced. His interests lay outside business, and he had the reputation of being one of the cleverest experimental chemists of the century.

Rudolph remembered how one evening in the seamy-sided days, when he was wandering through the streets of Buenos Ayres, a great banquet was being given by the Governor in honour of young Kenyon's visit to the city. He had come out as representative of his father to open a large public building presented by the firm of Kenyon and Braithwaite, who had amassed such wealth in the Argentine. Rudolph had found himself then envying the fortunate youngster whose birthright had put him beyond the reach of want or anxiety. He had thought of his wife slaving away in England, and he powerless to help her, and the longing and desire for her made him curse his fate. It was shortly after this that Rudolph had got to know the manager of the Argentine branch of the firm and his fortunes changed. Out there he had heard nothing but praise of George Kenyon, who was reputed to have neither side nor pretensions of any kind.

One late winter's afternoon Rudolph Hastings returned to the flat and was playing as usual with his little boy. Romping round the room together Rudolph had not heard the servant announce a visitor. He looked up suddenly and saw a young man standing in the doorway watching their game. He had sent the servant away and closed the door. Rudolph picked the baby boy up and put him on the sofa, where he sat laughing and crowing with pleasure. Still the young man did not speak.

"Yes?" said Rudolph with surprise. The set, sad look came into his face again which had been temporarily lost as he played with his child.

"I am George Kenyon," said the young man abruptly. He did not attempt to shake hands with the older man.

Rudolph bowed politely to the new head of his firm. "I am glad to see you," he said, with grave civility, surprised and gratified at the apparent consideration shown him by this early visit so soon after Kenyon's return to England.

"You won't be," said George Kenyon. "Don't think I want to interfere with your work or anything like that—only I must have the boy."

"The boy?" echoed Rudolph, and repeated the words slowly—"The boy?"

"Yes," answered young Kenyon, speaking quickly and fiercely, "the boy—my boy—her boy—our boy. I've waited as long as I could. I thought at first I could do without him—but I can't. Let me take him—I'll pay you well—anything you ask—but I want the boy."

Rudolph fixed his gaze on George Kenyon. Very slowly and vaguely at the back of his mind rose the spectre of some horror that stood by him until the End. But he did not realise the spectre's presence yet. His mind moved slowly before it understood the colossal thing which was come upon him. His eyes wandered away to the child on the sofa.

Then he looked up again at George Kenyon, who was standing with his hands behind his back, his head leaning against the dark background of the door. His hair was golden, and his cheeks as bright coloured as—

The golden-haired baby began gurgling and laughing and calling out "Dadda, dadda," and the spectre at the back of Rudolph's mind suddenly stood clearly defined to him. But he could not get at the words yet to describe what he was beginning to understand, but could not possibly focus into a definite idea.

"Yes, I want the boy," repeated George Kenyon doggedly.

"God in Heaven!" cried Rudolph at last.

Then there was a pause as the men stood facing each other.

"I ought to have come before," said Kenyon at last. "But I tried to do without him—mad fool that I was—I couldn't—and now I must have him at any price."

"But there's your wife," gasped Rudolph. He knew vaguely that he did not care what evil befel George Kenyon's wife, but no other words would come to him at the moment.

"Yes, there's my wife," said Kenyon; "but do you think the hollowness of my life with her makes the thing any easier? I tell you I mean to have the boy." He repeated the words with monotonous persistency.

Rudolph sat down groaning. The presumable head of Kenyon and Braithwaite stood on, leaning with his back to the door, his hands still behind him.

It seemed to Rudolph Hastings as he sat there that suddenly the end of the world had come, that judgment had been passed upon him and that he had been sent down into the nethermost Hell—to that same Hell which in his early boyhood he had been taught to dread—and since—to forget.

The whole of his life passed in review before him in those few seconds—his boyhood—his marriage—the years of struggle, of alternate hopes and fears, misfortunes, separation—and the prosperity which came too late, and, through all, his unceasing devotion to the dead woman, who had indeed been his wife,

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but, according to the things now revealed to him, had been also the mistress of the man standing before him.

"You devil!" said Rudolph suddenly and fiercely, rising to his feet.

"You left her alone for three years," cried Kenyon. "She loved me—she wanted the boy beyond anything—"

"And yet you couldn't even stand by her," interrupted Rudolph roughly. "You left her—for me to come back to."

"She would not let me stay," said Kenyon bitterly. "I was willing enough—and I've cursed myself often since for yielding to her whim. It killed her, I know. She wanted to save me from being ruined, as she imagined. Ruined! Good God! She was the only thing in the world—or out of it—I ever loved



Miss May Mukle

Who has made instantaneous successes as a solo violoncellist, both in London and America. In fact, she has been described by the New York Press as "the best violoncellist known to music-lovers." She is taking part this season in Mme. Beatrice Langley's chamber concerts

or ever shall. A man thinks he can forget these things. So he does sometimes, but not with a woman like that, and you know it. I want the boy—he's mine. You thought he was born prematurely, and—and that's what killed her; but there was nothing premature, I tell you. She was bound to die, anyhow. She was heart-broken."

"Go to that writing-table," said Rudolph hoarsely. "In the drawer is a box—both pistols are loaded. Here's the key—the brass one—"

He flung a bunch of keys on the floor—some of the keys which guarded the deepest secrets of Kenyon and Braithwaite in the City.

"I might have guessed there'd be some killing," said George Kenyon quietly.

"I understand the whole hateful business now," went on Rudolph in the same strident voice, speaking staccato from the horror that filled him. "You made your firm appoint me, and that's the worst fact of all for me."

"I did my best for you both," answered Kenyon, coldly. "I thought it would help her. She wouldn't take a farthing from me when she was almost starving."

He picked up the keys and walked towards the writing-table. His hands trembled, but not from fear. He had brushed against the golden-haired baby as he passed, and touched its tiny hand. The passion he had felt for the mother and never lost possessed him. He opened the box and laid the two pistols on the table.

Rudolph tossed a shilling in the air. "Heads you fire first," he cried, and stamped on the spinning coin. He moved away and Kenyon picked it up.

"Heads," he said. "So be it," and he took up a pistol:

Rudolph went to the door and opened it. He took the key from the outside and put it on the inside, turning it in the lock. Then he stretched out his hand to the table and took up the other pistol and walked across to the window. The spectre was by him, clearly defined now, and the agony in his heart stabbed at him all the time.

Kenyon bent down and kissed the golden-haired baby.

"I've made him my heir as far as I could," he said quietly. "Nothing matters much."

"Shoot," cried Rudolph. He was standing silhouetted against the dying light.

The bullet lodged in the window-sash an inch above Rudolph's head.

Rudolph laughed. It was not a pleasant laugh by any means, and Kenyon shuddered imperceptibly.

"Go on now," he said, "and finish this business quickly. I'm glad the thing should be settled one way or another for all time. Stand by the boy. He belonged to her, anyhow," he added grimly.

Rudolph's face turned livid.

"Yes," he answered, "d—— you both, d—— you, d—— you!"

"Dadda, dadda," cooed the golden-haired baby.

At the sound of the child's voice Rudolph started, and for the space of a second paused.

Then he suddenly turned his back upon George Kenyon and fired, without looking, over his shoulder. There was a heavy thud. Kenyon had fallen across the floor, a huddled mass, shot through the heart, as fate would have it.

The frightened maidservants, terrified by the report of pistols, were knocking and trying vainly to open the door. Then they ran shrieking along the passage out of the flat, and there was silence.

Rudolph Hastings looked across at the child, but its face was the face of George Kenyon. It mocked at him from the sofa, where it was laughing and holding out its arms to him.

There was no golden-haired baby left for him in the world. There were no memories. There was nothing. Only the spectre beside him. He uttered a cry of despair. Then he lifted the pistol to his own head and discharged the second barrel.

And as he fell the golden-haired baby gurgled and laughed.

FRASER HILL.



THE MAN and the CAT

By Stephen Saint

HE atmosphere of the room was vitiated. Electric lights twinkled from odd corners. The fire burned brightly, and wreaths of smoke curled upwards from the pipes of the two men that sat before it. A large clock on the mantelpiece ticked vigorously, although its hands pointed to an hour that deceived no one but its utterly foolish and incompetent self. The room seemed to be full of snapshot photographs, billiard chalk, used envelopes, and good but exceedingly dusty chairs. It promised to look very unwholesome in the sunlight.

Between the two men before the fire lay a cat. It was an enormous Persian, and its fur was a fair imitation of chinchilla. Its ears lay back on its head, and its face had an apish appearance. The chin was even human. The big blue and yellow eyes stared steadfastly into the heat of the fire.

Neither man spoke until the pipe of the elder refused to smoke any longer. He knocked out the ashes and felt for his pouch.

"Hello, Jim, I've run out of baccy. How are you off?"

"Badly. I believe I'm smoking my last pipe." He produced his pouch and showed that it also was empty.

"Never mind. I'll run out and get some."

"I'll go, Bob. You've been waiting on me all the evening."

"Nonsense. I'm your host. I shan't be a minute." Bob scrambled out of his comfortable seat and picked up a cap.

"All right, old boy," said the other lazily. "Get plenty."

Jim Bevan, the man left behind, continued to smoke meditatively. Presently he felt a soft touch on his leg. He looked down and met the extraordinary eyes of the big cat. It mewed and showed a violently red mouth.

Bevan knocked it away. He hated cats, and this huge creature particularly. Had not his host, Bob Squire, been such a particular chum of his, he would not have sat in the same room with the odd animal.

The cat mewed again and padded lightly to the door, at which it scratched. Bevan guessed that it wished to follow its master, its devotion to whom was almost uncanny. A confirmed cat-hater himself, the fact that his friend tolerated the devotion of one of the species had always been a matter of surprise and even disgust to him.

Once more the cat pawed his leg, this time not so gently. Bevan tried to shake it off, but it clung to his trouser-leg, mewing. The man picked up a book

and hit the animal lightly on the head. It drew back and crouched on the rug, its eyes flaming angrily.

Bevan half expected it to spring upon him, and waved his book menacingly. The cat ran to the door, and, scratching fiercely, set up a prolonged caterwauling.

Bevan muttered an imprecation under his breath, and flung Blackstone's Commentaries full at its head.

The cat was fairly hit and retreated from the door. For a few moments it crouched, looking first at Bevan and then at the door, its tail waving angrily. Then, like some mad thing, it again flung itself at the panels and tore at them furiously with its big claws.

"That's enough of that, you silly old grimalkin," growled Bevan. He got up and chased the cat away. The woodwork where it had been scratching was quite deeply scored.

The cat ran right away this time, and kept running excitedly round the furniture. Bevan watched it with considerable interest. Its hair was all on end, its tail erect, and it whined almost continually.

Bevan returned to his chair a little impatient at the length of time his friend had taken to perform his simple task. Immediately the cat made for the door, and recommenced its frantic scratching. The noise it made had by now got on Bevan's nerves, and he determined to silence the animal once and for all. The cat showed no sign of fear at his approach, but continued its unpleasant din. He gave it a gentle kick without producing any effect. For a moment he laid his hand on the handle of the door, and the cat immediately stopped scratching as if it waited for him to open it. The man was half inclined to let the creature have its way, as its uncanny excitement gave him a very uncomfortable feeling. But he reflected that it would almost certainly get lost or stolen, and he knew with what genuine affection his friend regarded it.

Again he kicked the cat. It spat at him, and vigorously continued its scraping. Shrugging his shoulders, Bevan returned to his chair. Hardly was he seated when the animal was again pawing at his leg, whining more miserably than before.

The cat's pawing filled Bevan with an unreasonable feeling of intense disgust. He could not look into its eyes without a shudder. He snatched up the poker. Instantly the cat was away, growling less miserably and more menacingly. It crouched some yards away, and just in time Bevan realised that it was going to spring at him. He dodged aside and the cat landed on his chair. Again it sprang from the chair straight at his throat. He struck out with the poker and just knocked the big beast down in time. The cat's mouth was foaming, and Bevan noticed with horror that his clothes were spattered.

Growing thoroughly out of temper at his friend's non-arrival he stood nervously expecting another leap. But the cat's head was turned towards the

door. The animal was trembling, and, for a few minutes, silent. Then one appalling scream came from its throat. Again it flung itself up on the door, tearing frantically at the wood.

Bevan was, by now, thoroughly uncomfortable, and at a loss to account for the animal's behaviour. He noticed, too, that there was a strange scent in the air, attractive, even refreshing, not unlike ammonia. But the sight of the foaming animal was nauseating to him. Hurriedly he threw a cloth over the cat. In a moment the now thoroughly enraged beast had disentangled itself. Spitting fiercely, it crouched and sprang at his throat. Bevan knocked it down with the poker. He was trembling all over. The cat had surely gone mad. He would have to kill it.

It sprang again. Round he swung the poker with all his force, and hit the cat's head as a left-handed batsman punches a ball on the leg. The cat hurtled into the fireplace and lay limp on the fender.

Wiping his streaming forehead with his sleeve, Bevan nervously approached the body and prodded it. He hoped that the cat was only stunned. It showed no sign of life. He examined it more carefully. The animal's neck was broken.

For some time it was as much as Bevan could do to master his inclination to faint. The strange, fresh scent had no reviving effect on him. With a duster he removed the flakes of foam with which the dead brute had bespattered him, and then mixed and drank a strong brandy and soda. What explanation he could make to Bob Squire he did not know. It seemed absurd to relate that the cat had suddenly gone mad. Yet, to all appearances, that was precisely what had happened. Bevan was satisfied in his own mind that only by killing the animal had he saved himself from serious injury.

Bob had, by now, been gone over half an hour, and it should not have taken him more than five minutes to get to the tobacconist's and back.

Bevan was about to put on his hat and go out to see what had delayed his friend when the bell of the front door of the flat rang. Wondering if Bob had forgotten his keys, Bevan answered the bell. A policeman stood at the door.

"Does Mr. Robert Squire live here?"

"Yes. He is out at present."

"Are you related to him?"

"No. He is a friend of mine. Why do you ask?"

"Well, sir, a gentleman has just been run over by a motor-car, and the letters in his pocket bear this address."

"Good heavens! Is he seriously hurt?"

"I'm afraid—I'm afraid he's dead, sir."

Simultaneously with a feeling of horror and grief, Bevan remembered the amazing conduct of his dead friend's cat. On hearing the terrible news he at once drove in a cab with the policeman to the station. Terribly battered and mangled though his friend was, he was easily able to identify him. Sticking out of the dead man's jacket pocket was a large tin of tobacco, badly dented. The sight of it added somehow to the horror of the experience. It was awful to look down upon this mis-shapen thing and reflect that but a few hours previously he had gripped its warm, strong hand in the grasp of friendship. He shuddered at his relief in escaping from the sight.

The hour was late and very few people were about. Bevan strode along with his hands in his pockets, an empty pipe in his mouth. He looked straight ahead of him, his mind absorbed with the tragedy of the evening. About his person he still seemed to carry the curious fragrance of the room in which he had been forced to kill the cat. Its mad eyes seemed continually to gaze into his. He recalled with a shudder the peculiar sensation he had experienced as his weapon struck the big, soft creature down to its death. Just such a feeling, he reflected, must have quivered through the body of the driver of the car that had slain his friend. That the cat, in some weird fashion, had instinctive knowledge of its master's fate he did not for a moment doubt. It was just the demoniacal cleverness and uncanny understanding of the feline tribe that had always repelled him.

As he turned the corner into the street in which he lived, he became conscious that he was being followed. He turned, and immediately something struck him in the leg, something that stung. The claws of a thin, grey cat were buried in his leg!

Bevan's cry was nearly a scream. He dragged the creature off and kicked it fiercely. Instantly something else fixed on his right calf. He swung his leg frantically, but a black cat had got a firm grip on it, and he had to drag it also off with his hands. As he bent two more leapt on his shoulders. Yelling for help, Bevan swept them off.

He turned and ran in terror, the grey cat clinging to his shoulders.

How he made his way to the front door of the block of flats wherein he lived he could not tell. He felt the cats following him stealthily. He felt warm blood trickling down his legs and neck. He dared not stop to rid himself of the creature that clung so tenaciously to his back. As he stopped at the door, nervously fumbling with the lock, the cats—there were now six of them—attacked him again. Two brutes on his shoulder were clawing at his face, when the door suddenly opened. He staggered inside, and with hands and feet set about his vicious attackers.

Four had managed to get inside. He wrenched them off his clothing, but the venomous beasts quickly got a fresh hold. The same strange scent allured his senses as when he had killed the big Persian.

He ran up the first flight of stairs, and threw up the landing window. Then, one by one, he wrenched the animals from his person and flung them out.

For some time after ridding himself of his persecutors he leant out of the window and inhaled the fresh air. His skin was tingling from a hundred scratches, and one nasty gash on his neck was bleeding copiously. The scent still clung to him. He felt inhuman.

He looked at his hands, which were scarred and gashed most horribly, and shuddered as if from fear. Quietly and nervously—as a man unfit for the society of his fellows—he crept upstairs and went into his rooms. He was glad that he had met no one. Somehow the abiding sensation left by the evening's experiences was one of shame.

Some weeks later Bevan sat in his rooms writing. The day had been intensely hot. He had spent it on the river, and was still wearing his flannels. He was sipping ice-water as he wrote. An oculist by profession, he was engaged on an essay for a medical review.

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The room was very quiet. Outside, rain streamed down in a black torrent, and occasionally thunder rumbled in the far distance. Bevan wrote on almost mechanically. His handwriting was extremely beautiful. He used his pen rather as an artist uses his silver pencil. Everything in the room, indeed, revealed its subservience to the master's artistic eye. A bowl of multi-coloured sweet peas stood in the centre of the writing-table.

A sharp knock at the door of the flat was greeted by Bevan with a gesture of annoyance. A boy had brought a telegram, and Bevan read its contents anxiously. It read as he expected. A near relative—the only relative he had left in the world—was at death's door. Would Bevan come at once?

The man had been seriously ill for some time, and



"One, two, and a third fastened upon him"

Bevan knew that this was a summons to a death-bed. Dismissing the boy, he returned to his room and looked out of the window. The night was very black, and it still rained heavily. It was an awful night to go out in, but Bevan quickly made up his mind.

He stripped off his flannels and changed into an old suit and stout boots. Then, snatching up an umbrella, he hastened downstairs.

He looked round anxiously for a cab. But, on such a night as this was, cabs were few and far between. His friend lived on the north side of Clapham Common, Bevan on the south side. He reflected that, even if he managed to get a cab, he would not arrive at his destination much quicker than if he walked over the Common. He, therefore, soon decided on the latter course.

It was a miserable walk. The night was pitch black, and, notwithstanding the constant rain, very

warm. Bevan plodded through the slush very unhappily, his mind now on his dying relative, and now on his unfinished essay. He began to perspire freely, and his discomfort was increased by the rain soaking the legs of his trousers.

Soon he noticed that his progress was accompanied by a peculiar fragrance. He lit a pipe to relieve his nostrils, but still this strange odour pursued him. Suddenly he stopped, as sharply as if his heart had stopped beating.

The scent was the same as that he had encountered on the night he had slain the Persian cat!

With a shudder he realised that, in his hurry, he had put on the same suit he had worn on that hideous night and had never used since. He was half tempted to go back and discard the garments, but, remembering the object of his journey, he shrugged his shoulders as if to throw off his fears as ridiculous, and hurried on.

Still the madly intoxicating scent hung around him. Again he experienced the awful sensation of fainting. He bit on his pipe and almost ran.

Now—most horrible—came a repetition of the feeling that he was being pursued. He dared not turn round. His teeth chattered and his pipe fell to the ground. He did not dare to stop to pick it up, but strode fiercely on, battling with the mud and rain.

Then came the inevitable end of the sequence of horrors. Something flung itself upon his leg and he felt sharp claws in his flesh.

He did not cry out. By then he was expecting such a thing to happen. Lowering his umbrella, he forced the animal off and broke into a run.

Something ran past him and leapt at his throat. He struck at it with the umbrella but missed. With one hand he dragged a dripping wet cat from his waistcoat. This time he yelled at the top of his voice, and ran furiously.

One, two, and a third fastened upon him. He turned round, despairing, mad to kill. He got one under his heel, and crushed its head. Others fastened upon him. The night was twinkling with golden eyes.

Long he fought. He had no breath to cry out. With his kicks he sent several howling away. With his hands he wrenched at the necks of many of them. But when his body was born down by them, so that as soon as he was rid of one another leapt into its place, he did a mad thing.

He flung himself down and rolled on them. A surge swept over him. He rolled and rolled. He felt them tearing at his face, but his consciousness was going. Then he found himself in the water.

From the little island in the centre of one of the small pools on Clapham Common a man was rescued on the following morning. He was very, very wet, very scratched, and had but one eye and one ear.

STEPHEN SAINT.

NOTICE TO AUTHORS

All Stories submitted for the consideration of the Editor of "The Bystander" would, if accompanied by a brief resumé of the plot, enjoy a chance of an early decision. Many manuscripts reach this office daily, and the editorial time is limited.



By ARNOLD GOLSWORTHY

GARVIN HALSTEAD, the eminent scientist, had some years before his death entirely given up experimental work. When his papers came to be investigated by his executors, the following explanation of his action was found :

June 22, 1893. I, Garvin Halstead, do declare that from this date onward I will not open my laboratory again. Here are my reasons—

On Thursday last I was summoned to the drawing-room by a visitor. He was a stranger to me, and I was not impressed by his appearance. Well-dressed, and seemingly well-to-do, he was nervous and troubled, and never once during our interview did his eyes meet mine. He spoke to me somewhat as follows :

"I have come to you, Mr. Halstead, on a matter of great importance. I want your help, and I am prepared to pay for it. But first of all I ask you to pledge me your word that this interview between us shall remain a secret, at least during my life."

I saw no objection to giving the pledge, and told him so. I was a young man, and the abnormal thirst for knowledge which the vulgar call curiosity had me very much in its power at the time.

"You have doubtless read in the papers of my father's death. The news has been published under the title of 'The Bloomsbury Square Murder.' My father was Edward Marvell. I am his son, Charles Marvell."

I made a conventional expression of sympathy, and apologised for the fact that, taking no interest in newspapers, I had heard nothing of the murder.

"My father," explained Mr. Marvell, with a tremor in his voice that I attributed to natural grief, "was found at the foot of the stairs of his house—dead. It was at first conjectured that he had fallen and struck

his head with a severity that had proved fatal. But he was not an old man—he was barely sixty. There was no reason why such a fall should have killed a man of his age and vigour. On the other hand, the police found lying near him a walking-stick that could not be identified as having belonged to him. The head of the stick was heavily loaded with lead. It was decided at the inquest that my father had been killed by a blow from this stick—that he had, in fact, been murdered by some person or persons unknown."

I moved a little impatiently in my chair. My visitor was, it seemed to me, growing discursive. What had his father's death to do with me ?

"I know why my father was murdered," continued Mr. Marvell, and I could see his whole frame trembling as he spoke. "I want to know the name of his murderer. That is why I have come to you for help."

"My dear sir!" I exclaimed, overwhelmed with surprise and confusion, "you surely do not suspect me—"

"Oh, no," he said, still speaking tremulously. "I have expressed myself very clumsily if I have conveyed such an implication as that. You must please forgive me. My father had a valuable secret in his possession. He was, like yourself, a scientist."

I bowed slightly, still at a loss to discover the drift of my visitor's argument. Indeed, it seemed almost as if his recent bereavement had unhinged his mind.

"My father," continued Mr. Marvell, "had undoubtedly, the day before his death, discovered the secret of making gold. I know a little of alchemy myself. I saw him make the gold. I know most of the ingredients, and I followed the work of compounding them easily. It had been his intention to commit the secret of his discovery to writing, but he put the matter off from day to day. He had been offered

large sums to communicate the secret, but he had never done so. The man who murdered my father must have been one of his acquaintances, who, in a sudden fit of frenzy at being refused the secret that he sought, beat my father to death, and thus lost for ever the chance of obtaining that secret at all. I want that man's name."

"I am afraid," I said a little stiffly, "I do not know it."

"But my father knows it," cried the young man, starting to his feet and hurriedly wiping his damp forehead with his open hand.

"I understood you to say that your father is dead," I observed, as I rose from my chair.

"Yes, yes," he said, and his agitation seemed to increase as he spoke. "But you are a great scientist. You could bring him back to life."

"I? You are talking nonsense, sir!" I protested angrily. "This is not a fit moment for jests."

"I am in deadly earnest, Mr. Halstead," he replied, looking down at the small table before which he was standing, and rubbing his fingers nervously along the polished surface. "A month ago you published the account of a recent discovery you had made. With some galvanic apparatus or other you imparted to the body of a guinea-pig that had been dead two days a semblance of life. So much so that for two or three minutes it raised its head and opened its eyes. Is it true that you did this, or am I to understand that the experiment was only born of your imagination?"

"How dare you, sir!" I exclaimed. "The facts are—"

"Hear me," he interrupted. "What you have done once you can do again. My father has been dead two days. All his organs are still sound. I say to you that by strengthening your apparatus to meet the circumstances of the case it is within your power to bring my father back to life if only—"

"You must be mad, sir!" I interjected. "If you think—"

"Mad or not," he retorted, "I am sufficient of a scientist to know that you do not believe it impossible. I say that with sufficient galvanic power you can bring my father back to life for a minute—half a minute—ten seconds, if you will. Long enough for his brain to form and his lips to speak the name of the man who struck him down. I ask you to make the attempt in the name of law and justice, in the name of every man who has held it a holy duty to avenge a father's murder!"

He sank in his chair again, trembling from head to foot. I confess that his proposal had begun to interest me. As I have said, I was a young man—I was of an age when the impossible is easy to accomplish—in dreams. And then his plea that I might be serving the ends of justice by accepting this strange commission had considerable weight with me, to say nothing of the prospect of immortal fame which the chance of success held out to me.

"You can name your own terms," Mr. Marvell said at length. "If you consider five hundred guineas would repay you—"

"We can discuss the terms later," I said. "Supposing I agreed to attempt this thing, how and when should we proceed?"

"It must be done this afternoon about three o'clock," he replied. "Naturally the servants must know

nothing—must suspect nothing. But I am expecting the undertaker about five. It will be sufficient if you will be willing to call at the house in a suit of black. I will be there to let you in. Will you require to bring much in the way of apparatus?"

"No," I replied. "I can charge all my batteries here. The instrument I use for the actual experiment will make quite a small parcel."

"And you agree to try it?" he asked.

I thought the matter over carefully for a moment. Look at it which way I would, I could find nothing in the proposed experiment likely to hurt either the conscience or the reputation of an honest man. And on the other hand, the possibility, remote as it was, of even moderate success, fascinated me beyond everything.

"I agree to do this thing," I said quietly but resolutely. And, after he had given me a few additional instructions, Mr. Marvell hurried away.

It was three o'clock precisely as I walked up the steps of the house in Bloomsbury Square. It would be idle to pretend that I was not nervous; and I should admit also that my first enthusiastic hopes of success had not been long-lived. As I stood there, trembling with the apprehension of certain and undignified failure, I had almost resolved to abandon the foolish adventure and return home. But while I still hesitated, the street door opened softly and Mr. Marvell motioned me to step inside, placing his forefinger to his lip to enjoin silence.

It was indeed a house of the dead. Darkened and silent, its effect upon me was horrible, especially as, salve my conscience as I would, I could not conquer the feeling that I was a guilty man. I was taken to a room on the first floor, where, covered with a sheet, the dead man lay on a bed.

"We must be quick," whispered Marvell to me. "If there should be the least sign of life, you will go outside and leave me to speak to my father alone."

I nodded acquiescence, and set about adjusting my apparatus. My hands trembled so violently at first that I was compelled to ask Marvell's assistance once or twice in order to enable me to proceed. The nature of my apparatus I shall not describe. I have done with such experiments for ever, and it is my least desire to tempt others to follow an example that I am now convinced I ought never to have set.

I applied the current gradually at first—beginning with the soles of the dead man's feet. Presently my interest in the absorbing experiment outweighed my fears, and I forgot everything but the work in hand and the mad hopes I had built upon it. Marvell was, after a while, trembling far more than I; and I saw him drink brandy to steady his nerves. Under my directions, he fixed a part of the appliance over the dead man's heart, and another part upon his head. Then I increased the force of the current by degrees, watching fearfully for the least sign that the flesh was being scorched in any part.

Five minutes went by, and then ten. I looked up at Marvell and was astonished to see how much the experiment was affecting him. He stood with his hands tightly gripping the back of a chair, and would not even remove them in order to wipe away the perspiration that rolled in great beads down his face. It was not unnatural that this desecration of the dead should have troubled his mind considerably; but, on

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the other hand, it was a work that was a proof of his deep filial devotion. For myself, I had got so interested in the experiment that I no longer regretted I had come to conduct it.

Marvell suddenly gripped me by the arm. "Don't go on—don't go on with it," he whispered hoarsely. "I can't bear it any longer."

I was going to reply, pleading for another few moments or so, when the dead man's mouth twitched spasmodically. I saw it distinctly, and turned to Marvell. He nodded to me to intimate that he, too, had seen the strange thing, and then, gasping for very breath, he staggered forward to make a closer scrutiny. There was more colour in the dead man's face than in Marvell's at that moment.

One of the arms shook and then contracted spasmodically. The movement seemed to fill Marvell with something like desperate courage. He turned slightly towards me without taking his eyes from the dead man, and motioned me outside. Seeing that I hesitated, he pushed me angrily towards the door, and as soon as I had reluctantly quitted the room he bounded after me and locked me out. Since I had agreed to leave him alone at the first sign of apparent consciousness, I could not complain, but I resented bitterly having to abandon my experiment at the point at which it would have been so instructive for me.

How far I had succeeded I could not at first conjecture, as I stood impatiently outside the door. I could only hope that as soon as Marvell had tried his own experiment—that of questioning the temporarily reanimated body—he would call me in again. I comforted myself with the reflection that he would probably tell me everything I really cared to know; and much of the rest I could find out from my subsequent examination of the condition of the corpse.

Nevertheless, I stood at the door and listened eagerly, trying to account for and interpret every movement. I could hear Marvell's heavy breathing—almost a prolonged groan it was. His footsteps, as he moved here and there, were distinctly audible to me. Then my heart beat more quickly, more wildly; for I heard something more than Marvell's step. There was a jerky, shuffling, tottering kind of stride—and I knew it was—the other's!

So far I felt convinced that my experiment had succeeded. The dead had awakened—if not to life at least to something remarkably like the semblance of it. I felt I would have given my right hand if I could only have got into the room to witness the result of my efforts. The shuffling grew more vigorous and at the same time more spasmodic. I heard Marvell whisper a hoarse question—and I heard him moan as he whispered it. Then, all at once, the moan changed to a frightened cry—a gurgling shriek of mingled terror and despair. I heard Marvell's voice calling:

"Help! help! He is at me. Help! Burst the door down quickly! Help! I shall be—"

The cry died away with a sound of choking. I shouted a word of encouragement and set my shoulder vigorously to the door. But I had not the strength to burst the lock. I could do nothing but rush to the head of the stairs and scream like a frightened child:

"Help! help! help!"

A young man came bounding angrily up the stairs, three at a time. He laid a hand on my shoulder and

almost shook me in his wrath as he exclaimed in a loud whisper:

"What does this mean? Is this proper behaviour for the house of the dead? Why are you not inside with the other undertaker?"

I pushed him towards the door without replying at once to his question. "Quick!" I gasped. "Help me to burst the door open. I will explain later."

The young man threw himself at the door without waiting for my assistance. Before his burly form the lock snapped like rotten tinder; and the next moment we were in the room.

At the sight before us the young man turned pale and staggered for very fear. I had the greatest difficulty in steadying my own nerves, but the feeling that I was to a large extent responsible for what I saw gave me sufficient courage to go on. With a bound I sprang to the middle of the room.

There on the floor was young Marvell, while lying beside him with his bony fingers digging into Marvell's throat was the dead man. As I judged at the moment, the effect of the galvanism had been to set in motion the muscles that had been stilled by death—they were simply continuing the action that the brain had directed before it had been suddenly stilled like an extinguished lamp. But at the moment I wasted no time in reflection. I flung myself on my knees and strove to tear the fingers away, at the same time appealing to the stranger for assistance.

"Help me—quickly!" I cried, as I looked down on the blackened face and starting eyes of the young man. "Good God! young Marvell is dead. Look at him!"

We dragged the two apart, and then the young man, in a broken voice, exclaimed:

"What is it? This is the man they are looking for. How came he here?"

"This is Mr. Charles Marvell," I explained, endeavouring to find some sign of life in him. "He came to me—"

"No, no!" said the stranger, still speaking tremulously. "I am Charles Marvell."

I looked up at the young man in astonishment. There was no doubting the obvious sincerity of his claim. I told him as briefly as possible who I was, and who and what had brought me there. And having said so much, I added, pointing to the strangled man:

"Who—who is he?"

"That man," said he, whom I now knew to be Charles Marvell, "was my father's murderer. The police only succeeded in satisfying themselves as to that this morning. He came to you under false pretences. The question he wanted to ask was the question that my father refused to answer during his life. For that refusal this man struck my father dead, and then, repenting of his folly, came to you in the hope that there might yet be time to get the answer he sought."

I stood looking at the two bodies in dismay, swayed by a hundred accusing thoughts. Mr. Charles Marvell went on:

"God has given the answer," he said solemnly. "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life. Help me to put some order here, sir," he added, having suddenly grown strangely calm.

And we stretched out the dead reverently, and crossed their hands on their breasts.

ARNOLD GOLSWORTHY.



IOUGHT to commit suicide, Jim."

"I really believe that it is the only decent way out of it."

Hilary Cutts buttered his toast and munched reflectively. It was eleven in the morning, and he was enjoying a late breakfast. Opposite him sat Jim Benziger, from the upstairs flat.

"It's hardly a decent way, but I suppose it's the only way."

"I shouldn't do it in any way likely to cause pain to your relations. Make it look as if it were an accident."

"Very thoughtful of you, Jim."

"Not at all, Hilary. Are you insured?"

"Good heavens, no! You know I live absolutely from hand to mouth. I owe two months' rent for this flat."

"Then you can't be living from hand to mouth. Blessed are they that owe, for they invariably live in luxury. But don't change the subject. How will you do it?"

"I don't think I should ever pluck up courage enough to execute myself. Couldn't you murder me?"

Jim Benziger sprang to his feet. His eyes blazed.

"Hilary," he almost shouted, "Hilary, what a splendid notion!"

Hilary Cutts was the eldest son of the late Nathaniel Cutts, who had married one of his shop assistants. Cutts Senior had acquired great wealth from his haberdashery business, and more particularly from the exploitation of an Unslippable Sock Suspender. He had eagerly spent his thousands on the education of his children, Hilary, Ian, Gladys, Angus, Evelyn, Roy, Stephanie, Marcus, Miriam, Maximilian, Ellaline, and Cyril. All, by the way, had been named by Mrs. Cutts, whose passion for cheap novelettes easily survived the era when she "slept in" and made sheep's eyes at her future husband. The boys had gone to a famous Public School, and afterwards to Universities; the girls had

been over-educated by sentimental professors at home. Unfortunately, the family turned out badly. Hilary proved a shocking scamp, and nearly broke his father's heart. He was forbidden the privilege of crossing the family threshold at the age of twenty-two. His brothers and sisters were really no better. They were even less capable than Hilary, but they adroitly managed to retain a semblance of the parental favour. Mrs. Cutts was the first to die, followed by her husband six months later. Hilary was then thirty-three.

The wealthy haberdasher's will was a remarkable document. It decreed that his money was to be divided equally among his children, with the exception of Hilary, who was to have absolutely nothing. It seemed a cruel arrangement, but there were good reasons for the old man's bitterness. At any rate, it is unnecessary to repeat a very unpleasant story here. Not only was Hilary to derive no benefit from his father's estate, but during his lifetime the same disability attached to his brothers and sisters. The old man had cunningly guessed that cutting Hilary out of his will would by no means prevent that young man from living comfortably on his brothers' and sisters' money. He knew that Hilary was the idol of the family, and that his wishes as to the disposal of the money would certainly be thwarted. He had, therefore, decided on this very eccentric scheme. The whole of his property was to be capitalised, and the interest was to be allowed to accrue until such time as Hilary chose to die. Then, and not before then, Hilary's eleven brothers and sisters would have the haberdasher's fortune.

When the terms of the will were made known, Hilary promptly became very unpopular with his brothers and sisters. His continued existence became irksome to them. The youngest, Cyril, had just turned nineteen, so that all were of an age at which work is endurable. To their credit be it said that they all made an attempt to earn a living. There was, indeed, nothing else for them to do. Two or three of them visited the money-

lenders, but the latter astute gentry wanted a very substantial rate of interest when they learnt that Hilary rejoiced in that vulgar sort of health which usually carries a man safely to a doddering old age.

Of all the twelve Hilary was the most successful. He alone had any sort of individuality. He did fairly well as a designer of stained glass windows in the daytime, and a concert-room artist at night. But his tastes were expensive. He borrowed more than he made. He gave away more than he could afford. His debts were catholic.

One by one his brothers and sisters found him out. Each one of them begged of him. They imagined he made more than was actually the case. The whole eleven were failures, the girls because they were plain, and the boys because they were too ornamental. Hardly a day passed on which Hilary did not receive a despairing letter from at least one of them. Their appeals to him, the cause of all their troubles, worried him immeasurably. He liked them all; he knew that it was not their fault that they were failures, and he was intensely conscious of the fact that only his physical being stood between them and happiness.

Matters had arrived at a pretty pass on the morning that Jim Benziger chose to join him at breakfast. Not only was he in very low water himself, at his wit's ends, indeed, to fulfil certain quite honourable obligations far above the plane of landlord and tradesman, but the morning post had brought him no fewer than four letters, each calculated to bring tears to the eyes of a statue.

"If I were to consent to your murdering me," said Hilary, quite seriously to his friend, "should I be doing you a good turn?"

"Tremendous. In the first place, I don't think a man has ever consented to be murdered before in real life. It would be a new thing to do. That makes it worth while."

"But you wouldn't run the risk of being hung, Jim, merely for the sake of testing a new sensation?"

"I should run no risk, as I will willingly explain to you. But it's not only for the sake of doing something novel that I am so glad of the opportunity. You know I am a playwright—a melodramatist. Every play I have writ, or, I should say, every play of mine that has drawn royalties, contains at least two murders. I have never committed a murder. I have never seen one. Look what a tremendous advantage it would be to me to have experienced the sensation of blowing another man's brains out. I could write a murder scene that would paralyse humanity. I should—er—make more money."

"I think you're a beast. You needn't be so damned enthusiastic about it."

"I can't help it. It's the chance of a lifetime."

"It would serve you right if you were afterwards hung for it."

"Impossible. You have a revolver? Of course. And cartridges? Of course. You give me the weapon. I shoot you close to the temple and kill you. I rouse the house after placing the revolver in your hand. The police find you surrounded by these letters, cogent reasons, indeed, for destroying yourself. I swear that I witnessed the deed, and was too late to prevent it. *Voila tout!*"

Hilary coughed, walked to the fireplace and filled his pipe from the jar.

"You're a selfish devil, Benziger," he began.

"Not at all. If you wish to live, I am the last to interfere. If you wish to die, why not employ me to effect what you would never have the courage to do yourself?"

"Hang your reasoning. If I've got to die, I'll stage-manage the business myself. I'm not particularly squeamish, but I don't like the idea of selling my body before it's cold. That's what it comes to."

"Pah! You're sentimental."

"Sentimental. Ye gods! What a charge! Do you realise the state of affairs those letters reveal? My younger brothers, my younger sisters starving. Poor bodies, poor brains, but my flesh and blood. They've worked, they've striven, and the world's been too much for them. They weren't born for or to expect hard fighting. They're all gone, or going, under. It's awful, awful, awful! The little sisters, Jim, I used to escort to parties. Pretty, pink little kids, they were then, in their little lace frocks and silk stockings, coloured ribbons, and long, loose hair. Little dears, little dears, Jim. Excuse me sniffling. Then the boys, tough little chaps, they seemed once. They worshipped me, the oldest, the biggest, the strongest. They fagged for me, swore by me, lied for me, by me, through me, with me, and yes—God bless 'em!—to me. Jim, I can't let them go right under. I didn't mind their having troubles. When they grew older and more smug, I lost a lot of my love for 'em. But at a time like this it comes back—the old feeling. Blood, blood, blood—it rules the will, the brain. They'll be no good to anyone when they get the money. I'm some good as I am. My work's good. I might yet produce something that the world would be glad of, pleased to always remember. They never will. Yet I must die. It's my duty. I'm sinning every moment I live. To live—to sin! Isn't that a paradox? It's a new sin, Jim. To sin by living! It is wrong of me not to destroy myself. But it's hard, hard—damned hard."

"Where did you get that tobacco?"

Hilary jerked up his head a little indignantly.

"Why? What's—"

"Oh, it seems to make you very talkative, that's all."

Hilary grinned rather weakly, put his pipe in his pocket, and rang for the table to be cleared. Benziger carefully loaded his pipe from his friend's jar.

For some time they sat in silence. Both smiled to themselves, but Hilary's features were very haggard.

A ring at the front door bell roused them. Benziger rose to go.

"Don't go, Jim. It'll only be a summons or something of that sort."

"All right. It's a nuisance, though. I was trying to persuade you mentally to give me my way."

"I know. I felt it. You are a great deal more convincing when you are silent."

The little servant girl announced "Mr. Maximilian Cutts."

Hilary jumped. Max was the youngest but one of his brothers, had been his favourite as a boy. He looked at Benziger, and again that young man volunteered to go.

"I don't see why you should. Things may get a little too emotional for me if you do."

A clean-shaven young man was shown into the

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room. His eyes were furtive with the shame of poverty. His blue suit shone. His thin, brown boots made no sort of noise in contact with the floor.

"Good morning, Max," said Hilary. "This is Mr. Benziger. What's brought you round?" They had not met for two years.

Max looked in the direction of Benziger, who was gazing out of the window.

"Er—nothing much. You all right?"

"M'yes. Sit down. . . . Fill your pipe."

"No, thanks. I can't smoke."

"Rats! Smoke, man, smoke."

"Hil, old man, by God, I'm—I'm hungry."

Hilary grew cold, and his face turned an ashen grey.

"Not breakfasted, eh? Careless devil. We'll soon settle that."

Hilary rang for the girl, and demanded a fresh breakfast. Benziger made an excuse, and left the room.

The two brothers sat now alone together.

"I'm—damned sorry, Max."

"All right, old son. But it's been awful."

"I know, I know." Hilary shivered a little to find that his brother had acquired a slight Cockney accent.

The girl returned, looking a little frightened.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but the mistress says you can't have no more breakfasts till last month's bills is paid."

"Thank you. Convey my compliments to your mistress, and tell her that I have pleasure in cancelling the order."

The girl went away on the verge of breaking into tears.

"It's that way, Hil, is it?"

"Yes." Hilary went to the sideboard, and brought out a pot of jam, a bag of biscuits, and two bad apples. Max spread the jam on the biscuits with a spoon and ate ravenously.

"How did it happen to you, Max? I thought you were getting twenty-five shillings a week in a shop."

"I was. They fired me for—for—a girl in the mantles. The first, Hil, the first. I'm twenty-three—and the first. We couldn't help it." He choked horribly over a dry biscuit.

"Heaven help you, dear old Max. Did you tell the management what you thought of them?"

"What's the good? What's the good?"

"Max, you always miss your opportunities. I should rather have liked at the age of twenty-three to have been sacked for—for a girl in the mantles. It would have fired my eloquence. I should have said several splendid things, quiet things, things that strike across the mouth and leave a trickle of red blood. You are a pitiable figure, a poor man who doesn't know how to make the best of things."

"I would have done, Hil, but I haven't got your knack. I dry up when a man tells me I'm a dirty hound—and proves it."

"Proves it! Sin smirch his soul! Proves it. Did the pursy dog take his cigar out of his mouth while he said it? Did he fold his fat fingers, stare past you through his gold-rimmed glasses? I can see him serving out his sickening sentence, Max. Wasn't the room full of the wraiths of the poor anaemic little shopgirls that he had persecuted? Didn't you point them out to him? Heaven bless my soul, why didn't you kill him? You might have smashed him—

smashed him! These beasts never have any muscle. You could have crushed his head, Max, under your thin, brown boots. You could have mangled him. Oh, how you've made me see blood!"

"Don't get excited about it, Hil, old boy. It don't do any good. And you mustn't forget our father kept big shops and made people live in. He might have been like this brute, Davids."

"He might. He might. He probably was, Max. Our mother, you know, she——"

"She forced him."

"How the devil did you know?"

"We all know, don't we? She told Gladys one day, and Gladys has told us all at different times."

"Ah! What her life must have been like, eh, Max?"

"Unspeakable. Have you got any water?"

"Yes, and better—a little whisky."

Hilary filled a long tumbler with whisky and water for his brother.

"What are you going to do now, Max?"

"Starve." The man said it in an awful way. He meant it. There was nothing in the least theatrical about the answer.

"Didn't he give you a character?"

"Wasn't fool enough to ask for one after what he said."

"What did he say?"

"Said I was an unscrupulous scoundrel, that I couldn't afford to marry, and, therefore, had no right to have anything to do with women. He reckoned I was one of the curses of civilisation, living just for amusement, he said I was. Once I could have grinned at that. But all the time he was speaking, I was thinking 'My living's going—my living's going.' He kept calling me a scoundrel. I was blushing—burning. It sounded as if he was right. But he wasn't, was he, Hil?"

Hilary did not answer. He sat very still in his chair. His face was white, but his eyes glowed.

"Did you say this man's name was Davids?"

"Yes. Davids and Llewellyn. He's the senior partner."

"David Davids—that is his name, isn't it?"

"I believe so."

"He lives near here. I remember his putting up for the County Council, and coming to ask for my vote. He has a mole on the right side of his nose, yellow hair, eyebrows, eyelashes, and moustache. He looks very vile if you look at him closely."

"That's him right enough. Fancy the old—oh, dear, I do feel so sleepy."

Max yawned widely. The food and the whisky had been too much for his empty stomach.

"Come and lie on my bed." Hilary led his brother into his bedroom and watched him till he fell fast off to sleep. Then he returned to the sitting-room and carefully loaded his revolver in every chamber.

Mr. Councillor David Davids, J.P., was shot as he left his private residence. The murderer fired six bullets into his victim's body and generally behaved in an extraordinarily savage manner. The doctors, and subsequently the jury, certified him as insane, and the judge decreed that he should be detained in a criminal lunatic asylum during His Majesty's pleasure.

STEPHEN SAINT.



A Problem in Continenency.

By Stephen Saint.

AMIGHTY liner lay motionless in mid-ocean, in the still, soft silence that precedes a storm.

Its decks were crowded with people, British officers in neat uniform, men and women in evening dress, sailors of many nationalities. Over them rolled dense masses of smoke. The vessel was on fire.

Boatloads were quietly leaving the vessel-sides, boatloads of women and children. There was much sobbing as fathers parted from their daughters, as wives looked last upon their husbands. Only rarely did a woman's agonised scream pierce the grim quiet. The men mostly stared away where there were no blanched faces to meet the sight. Some smoked, and a few prayed ardently. One long, lean, and perfectly dressed American insisted on settling a bridge debt with a rather shocked Englishman. The remarkable part of the whole tragic scene was its peacefulness. The officers might have been giving orders to the men to row boatloads to the quay.

The crew were massed together, eagerly awaiting the departure of the last woman. One of them was sent with each boatload, but the tremendous responsibility was not coveted. Every man on board was aware of the storm ahead.

A seaman who answered to the name of Barry was sent with the last batch of women. He shrugged his shoulders as his name was called out, tossed his cigarette into the sea, and jumped in. As the boat was lowered away, a murmur of farewell came from his shipmates. Barry had been very popular on board, though this was his first voyage on the vessel. The seamen quickly recognised that he was new to the life, and his voice and manners exposed the fact that he was of gentle birth and training. His physique was splendid, his age was twenty-five, and he earned and won plenty of friends.

Barry was, as a matter of fact, the second son of a sporting and wealthy peer. He had quarrelled early with his father, and had made rather a mess of earning his own living. Then he had met the great temptation that assails every man once in his life, and it had come just at the worst possible moment for him. He had surrendered to the fiend, been found out, and had to bolt. His father paid the necessary sum to shield the family name, and Barry once and for all decided to forget his origin.

Now, as his heavy boat shouldered its way through the oily water, propelled by his great arms, he could not help reflecting on the mess he had made of his life. He knew that it was only a matter of, at the most, a couple of hours before he and his cargo of fair women

would be at the bottom of the sea. Already the wind began to rise and the rain to fall.

He looked carefully at the faces of the women who were to accompany him into eternity. There were eleven of them, two only, a lady doctor and one of the stewardesses, anywhere near the age when death had a right to intervene. The remaining nine were all English girls. Four were hospital nurses, *en route* to a great Colonial sanatorium, two were entertainers of some class, and the other three were but children of eighteen and nineteen returning to their parents after the completion of their education in Europe.

Barry had always had a pretty considerable contempt for women. He had enjoyed as much of their society as any man of his age, which meant that he was already rather tired of them. He was considerably surprised to note that most of them showed no outward sign of terror. He pretty correctly guessed that they did not properly appreciate the seriousness of the position. The youngest girl was crying, but very quietly.

He suddenly realised that by some odd chance quite the prettiest woman in the ship had been placed in his charge. They all looked at him hopefully and submissively, and he shivered as he reflected that he would have to listen to their last frenzied cries as the waves swept them away.

A hail on his port drew his attention to another of the ship's boats, barely a hundred yards away. It was in the charge of a wild young Irishman, who had been quite a chum of Barry's.

"Where are we, Dennis?" shouted Barry.

"God knows," sang Dennis back, cheerily enough. "Under-seas tube soon, I'm thinkin'. Next station—hell."

Barry smiled.

"Meet me at the booking-office, Dennis."

"Sure, but ye'll pay for your own ticket, m'bhoy."

Barry rowed aimlessly on. Dennis kept parallel with him, and suddenly started singing lustily, as if the sound of his own voice cheered him.

Yo—ho—here's to the life of a sailor,
Just the life for Bill Thompson and me.
I've drunk many a keg, and I've only one leg—
But Bill's down on the floor of the sea.

The storm broke. The boats rode high on the wave-crests, and hurtled down from mountain-tops into the heart of oily valleys. The women screamed now and prayed together. Barry kept his boat's nose straight, but the strain was great. Now and again he got a glimpse of Dennis's boatload. That worthy still sang

vigorously, but the voice sounded only occasionally through the noise of the storm.

"Yo—ho—here's to the life of a sailor!— Nell, darling, hold my hand. Pray, dear—. O God, O God, mercy, mercy, mercy!— But Bill's down on the floor of the seas.— Hallowed be Thy name, Thy Kingdom come!— Yo—ho—here's to the—. It won't last, dear; it won't sink.— Oh, do hold tight, dear—. O God, kill me, kill me!— Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.— I've drunk many a keg—. Let me go, let me go, let me die—. Deliver us from evil.—Amen."

Barry strove to shut his ears to the voices of the sufferers. Once he tried to pray, then blushed and wrenched harder at his oars.

The fury of the storm increased. The sky was dark, and all sign of the ship and the companion boats had vanished. Barry felt very much alone, but he did not speak a word to his passengers, now almost all in a state of collapse. He kept pulling the boat's head round to face the mighty mountains of water.

The end came quicker than Barry expected it. He slipped his starboard rowlock, the boat spun, and a wave knocked Barry off his seat. His head struck an iron pin, and he lay senseless at the bottom of the boat.

Barry's first sensation on recovering consciousness was a sharp pain in his head. Then he realised that he was very wet, though a tropical sun was fast drying his clothes. He felt very thirsty.

He sat up, and, for a moment, was considerably shocked to find himself alone in an open boat with a number of apparently dead women.

He reached forward and took the hand of the nearest woman. She moaned, and moved her head slightly. Barry stared at her in a very puzzled way. Then by degrees his memory returned. By some extraordinary miracle the boat had ridden the storm.

The sun shone brilliantly. It was obviously close on noon. Barry scanned the sea for signs of the ship or his companion craft. There were none. Then, as he turned his head to the bows, his heart gave a great leap. They were drifting slowly straight on shore!

His heart beat wildly; Barry examined the rocky cliffs for an opening. It looked as if within twenty minutes the boat would be shattered on the rocks. He glanced round for the oars, but all had been washed overboard in the storm. The mast and sail remained safe enough, and like a cat Barry pounced on them.

As he clamped the mast into position one of the women who lay on the floor of the boat actually sat up.

"You are saved," shouted Barry. "Get to the locker there and open it. You will find brandy. We can win out yet."

The woman looked at him wildly, not understanding.

Barry hoisted his sail, lashed it tight, and, darting to the tiller, got the boat's head round. She rode well, though low with the load of water she carried.

Next he opened the locker, and, dragging the half-animate woman to him, poured brandy into her mouth. It revived her almost at once.

"Then we are safe?" she asked, quite calmly.

"Yes, madam; but where on earth we are I don't know. What about these poor girls? Have you strength to examine them while I steer?"

The woman took the flask of brandy, and, crawling along the boat, examined her companions in turn. She was, Barry remembered, a Mrs. Carson, a lady doctor of some eminence.

There were only eight of the women left. The stewardess and the two singers had evidently been washed overboard. Mrs. Carson soon reported that all were alive, but not all had been able to swallow the brandy.

Barry soon found a suitable spot for landing, but saw that it was useless to try to get the women on shore till they had revived. He, therefore, skirted the coast, while Mrs. Carson worked heroically to restore some animation to her unfortunate companions.

A couple of hours' sailing showed Barry that they had struck a small island, the vegetation of which was apparently very luxuriant. The boat's telescope revealed no other land in sight.

By slow degrees the other passengers began to pick up. The sight of land did more than anything else to revive them. Soon Mrs. Carson and four others were at work bailing out the boat, and at about three in the afternoon Barry thought it safe to attempt a landing.

The creek he had noticed in the morning was found, and the nose of the boat soon kissed a sandy shore. Barry sprang out, and carried to land such of his passengers who had not yet recovered their strength. Then, with the help of the strongest girls, he drew the boat up high and dry on the beach.

The "Island of Mercy" steamed in the heat of a June sun. It was nearly three years since Barry and his shipwrecked comrades had landed on its shores. For three years the most constant sentinelship had failed to discover any sign of a vessel. The island obviously lay wide of all the usual shipping routes, but where neither Barry nor his companions could make any sort of estimate.

For three years the little colony had lived in perfect harmony. Barry's pluck and invariable good spirits had inspired the women, and they had thrown themselves into the work of providing shelter and food with a splendid vigour. The beautiful island was rich with wild life, and with snare, bow and arrow, and fishing-line they had easily stocked their larder. Water was good and plentiful, and edible fruits by no means scarce.

From existence in caves they had passed into proud possession of a long, one-floored bungalow, containing four rooms with a verandah connecting them. It had been built in a valley with its back to a precipitous slope, close to a spring. Near it were outhouses, in which they kept firing, supplies, and the goats they had captured and tamed. Before the house was a magnificent carpet of grass as smooth and resilient as a cricket-field.

Life, indeed, was very pleasant in this little paradise, but the hope of rescue was never abandoned by the party. From sunset to sundown a relay of sentinels scanned the horizon with the telescope, that so luckily had been part of the equipment of the boat, from the summit of the highest elevation on the island. At night a large fire was invariably lit in the same place, but no vessel had been sighted, no notice ever been taken of their flaming night-signal.

(Continued on page 206)

Barry was on duty with the telescope. His post commanded a view of the bungalow, in front of which the girls were practising archery. It was Barry's business, however, to watch the horizon, but when that uninteresting object had as a rival seven beautiful young women at athletic exercise it was difficult to pay strict attention to business.

Barry's gaze, somehow, was generally directed on the valley when Violet Govan was stretching her bow. Always a beautiful girl, the healthy life on the island had made a magnificent woman of her. She was dark, had deep, sea-grey eyes, and her limbs were magnificently shaped and muscular. It was she, indeed, who provided the best part of the food for the party, while Barry was engaged on the heavier work.

"She shoots well, Jack, doesn't she?" The question considerably startled Barry, who had not heard Mrs. Carson's approach.

"She does, indeed, Meg."

Mrs. Carson, a tall, straight woman, with a particularly noble face, looked at Barry closely. She had achieved a tremendous admiration for the man, but he puzzled her very considerably.

"There are no ships to-day, Jack?"

"There are not."

"Will there ever be a ship, Jack?"

"I never despair. We have been so fortunate that we could hardly have been spared to die here."

"Why not? The life is very beautiful."

"Meg—it's difficult for me to speak. You are the oldest of us here. You have tasted life, and—yes, and marriage—and parenthood—and this contents you. We are young."

The woman sat silent. Presently she laid her hand on Barry's shoulder.

"Jack, if—there never be a ship."

"Well."

"Are you never to taste life—I mean marriage and parenthood, for they are life?"

The man paled.

"How dare I? How dare I?"

"It is your duty."

"And a ship will come."

"Yes, and take back you and your—mistress, and your illegitimate children. Does that really shock you? Do you think those splendid young women down there would care a snap of the fingers for that narrow nonsense? Heaven, how small men are—with women."

Barry looked into her eyes, and thought and thought. He knew that he had developed something like a flaming love for Violet Govan, but he had vigorously quenched it whenever it assailed him. True, they had talked much together. He had told her the story of his life, and she had wrung his hand. They were—great friends.

Mrs. Carson knew of whom he was thinking. She let him think for a little while.

"A ship will never come, Jack, otherwise we should at least have seen one in the course of these three years. We shall live the rest of our lives here. We shall die here. One by one, Jack. Perhaps I shall go first. Perhaps you. Perhaps you will be last, Jack, last. Two left. You will bury her, and then you will dig your own grave, an old man then, and wait. Will it bear thinking of, waiting here alone for death, death of old age? And perhaps it will be a woman left alone."

Barry knew what his friend meant, and he covered his face with his hands.

"Jack, my dear, noble friend, there must be little ones in this fair island. Sons and daughters to bury their parents. 'Children's children are the crown of old men: and the glory of children are their fathers.'"

"Children's children!"

"Yes, Jack. You are continent. You are so wonderfully pure that you satirise your sex. But you are not alone here. You have served us like the great-heart that you are, but there is yet a service owing. Look at those splendid girls! Must they rust and crackle into a childless old age?"

For some time he did not answer.

"I will—if you wish it—put this—speak to Violet. If she be willing, I will marry her."

"No, Jack, that is useless."

He looked at her, very surprised.

"You have not the slightest understanding of women. To marry Violet would bring misery into this Eden. You would make her a queen by the very act of marrying her; you would exalt her to a position that could not but provoke the bitterest envy among those girls there. Life here would become intolerable."

"Then—you—mean that I—"

"To-night, after supper, when you have gone to light the signal-fire, I will speak of this to them."

"It cannot be."

"It must be. Think it over for months, as I have thought over it for months, and you will see that it must be. Sooner or later, it is inevitable."

Jack Barry set a light to the signal-fire. He watched it blaze for a little while, and then slowly descended the hill just as twilight deepened to night.

His brain was busy with the current of thought started by Mrs. Carson. He trembled at the solemnity of the idea. He saw himself the patriarch of a splendid race. "Children's children are the crown of old men: and the glory of children are their fathers." He stopped in his walk, and faced the stars. Did ever a man need more vitally the guidance of God?

The women sat silent as he entered. Immediately he became conscious, perhaps for the first time since he had been on the island, of their sex. They also seemed embarrassed by his entrance.

Violet sat alone. The others had evidently been talking together.

Mrs. Carson was the first to speak.

"I have spoken, Jack," she began, with obvious nervousness, "of what we discussed this afternoon. The girls, as I expected, were not unprepared. Each had known that—this would have to be settled one day. They are all—"

"Sh-h!" A girl leapt to her feet and covered Mrs. Carson's mouth with her hands.

"Nell, Nell, what's the matter, Nell?"

Boom!

"A gun, a gun! It's a signal-gun!"

"It is, it is. I knew I heard it!"

Boom!

"Hurrah, it is. We're rescued, saved!"

They burst noisily from the room.

Barry tugged his moustache, and slowly followed them. On the verandah a girl slipped into his arms. He felt Violet Govan's hot face on his lips.

STEPHEN SAINT.



Through the Open Window

By Muriel Hine.

IT was not a large window—and the ceiling of the room was low—but it jutted out into a futile attempt at a bay, and just held a narrow, deep armchair.

Moreover, the ledge, devoid of paint and worn smooth by reason of the window's constant shutting, was the exact height to suit one's elbows, so that one could loll half out, half in, and send long spirals of blue-brown cigarette-smoke forth meditatively into the dingy, badly trimmed garden beneath.

From the right, on a clear day, came the droning hum of the traffic in the long Avenue Victor Hugo, which, with my road—the Rue Spontini—and one other, formed a triangle of houses and enclosed a little nest of gardens, brown and grey with the wizened air of artificial "country," but gardens nevertheless, with painted wicket-gates in every variety of shape and colour, bending into a main path of weedy gravel that trailed and vanished round the curve up into the broad avenue on the right, where a Concierge's lodge and rickety door terminated it, and was closed (except to private keys) each evening at dusk.

It was one garden in particular that interested me; narrow and long like the others, but better tended, more of a garden and less of a dreary desert.

The gravel round the centre plot of grass was red—bright red—and free from weeds; a lilac bush heavy with blossom kissed a laburnum stripling down by the green wood gate; and there was an arbour, where the roses would cling in due course of time, with a crooked rustic seat, scrupulously polished and free from spiders.

That was "Madame's" duty.

Every morning early she would come out through the ivied porch and wave good-bye to her husband as he passed through the wicket-gate into the twisted path on his way to business.

How dainty she would look, in her pretty cotton *peignoir*, her fair hair gathered into a great knot on her bare white throat, her red lips parted in a smile as she kissed her hand gaily when "Monsieur" would turn for a last wave at the corner of the path.

And when it was damp, with what care she would

gather up her starched flounces, showing the little arched feet in their red morocco *mules* as she picked her way cautiously down the rain-soaked gravel! For whether or no, "Monsieur" must have his last good-bye!

And when he was out of sight the smile would fade from her face, and she would become visibly the anxious housewife again, and I could see her in imagination settling the *ménage* and often in reality pulling the blinds and curtains straight, darting from window to window like a restless butterfly, to emerge later, duster in hand, a line of determination on the smooth, white forehead, to polish up the rustic seat of the little arbour.

On Sundays the duty fell to the sturdy, red-cheeked *bonne*.

"Madame," I fancy, would lie in bed till late, to hurry up and appear in all her Sunday finery and proceed to Mass at the big church in the Rond Point.

Sometimes "Monsieur" would accompany her, but more often he would take his paper and book into the little arbour and read the morning away, rolling innumerable cigarettes with white, nervous fingers—the fingers of a man who sits at his desk from Monday early to Saturday late.

Not that he was effeminate, despite his small build and girlish hands and feet and his pale, rather puffy face, which the close-cropped hair *en brosse* and short, black beard intensified, but rather athletic naturally and wonderfully quick and supple in his movements.

This I learned one Sunday afternoon. They had entertained a visitor—a tall, curly headed man, very broad-shouldered and slight-waisted, with the fair, drooping moustache and blue almond-shaped eyes of *le vrai beau garçon* of a French romance.

The air was so still and warm with the breath of all spring around that I heard the husband distinctly, as he introduced the caller to his wife, "Mon ami, Armand!"

She blushed and smiled, and bade Monsieur be seated in the little arbour, and I saw the look of admiration on his face as he bowed his acknowledgment of the great honour his friend, "ce cher Gustave," had done him in the introduction.

The husband sat on a little stool at the entrance.

There was only room for two inside, and it seemed

to me as I watched him that his tired, preternaturally grave face looked whiter than ever against his wife's pink dress.

She had tucked a bunch of violets into the narrow ribbon at her dainty waist, and yet another in the coils of her waving chestnut hair, and they matched the colour of her shining eyes, and even the brilliant silk of her Sunday dress was faded and dull against the carnation of her lips.

And so the two chattered gaily, like bright-hued birds within a rustic cage.

I could fancy the skilful compliments of Armand, and "Madame's" pretty assumed annoyance and "Monsieur" "*ce cher Gustave's*" growing sense of boredom.

At last he got up and went indoors, and a sudden silence reigned within the little arbour.

Even I felt a sense of vague unrest—a queer presentiment of coming trouble. But after a while "Monsieur" returned, the smile of anticipation on his face, and in his hands two slender fencing foils. The little lady in pink clapped her hands excitedly, and the conceit vanished suddenly from young Armand's face as he tested the blades with the touch of experience.

It was time—and I knew it—to throw away my end of cigarette and leave my deep armchair, for work was calling to me within, and the day was growing old, but that such good fate as a fencing-match should take bodily shape and form under my very window and I be not there to see. . . .

And so I stayed.

Armand was good.

At first sight he was the stronger fencer—his length of arm gave him a quiet advantage, but, then, "Monsieur" was so quick upon his feet.

His blade flashed in and out—he was here, there, everywhere, and gradually I realised that he was pressing his opponent back, little by little, to the edge of the narrow grass plot.

Suddenly there was a quick lunge.

"*Touché!*" cried Madame, and it was difficult to say whether pride in her husband's skill or sympathy for the conquered friend rang out the heartiest in her clear voice.

They lowered their foils in silence, and shook hands solemnly, as only Frenchmen can over a mere triviality, and then "Madame" left them together with a wise little nod and expressive gesture of her restless fingers, and I guessed that the *ménage* was calling her.

Within the narrow arbour they smoked another cigarette, and Armand rattled on volubly with many gesticulations of his large, sun-tanned hands, whilst his host listened attentively with his habitual air of grave young business man, and at last "Madame" called to them from the open porch, and they all went in to dinner.

And gradually it became the rule. Every Sunday young Armand would appear, often in time for *déjeuner*, and in the afternoon the two would have their match, whilst "Madame" would sit and gaze, with all her heart in her eyes, following the flash of the blades under the summer sunshine from the shelter of the excellently dusted arbour.

Generally "Monsieur" won, but there came a Sunday, when the lilac bush was a brown relic of spring days and the roses clustered in bloom all over the rustic bower, and Armand's skill prevailed.

"*Touché!*" came "Madame's" clear voice, with a strange new throb of exaltation in it, and the breeze carried her next words up to my open window.

"All honour to the victor!" she cried gaily, and, reaching up with a quick, eager movement, she tore a red rose ruthlessly off its branch, and threw it at the young man's feet.

Carried away by the first sweet flush of success, his laugh of triumph rang out young and full of life as he stooped down, and picking up the token pressed it, smiling, to his lips.

But "Monsieur's" serious face went whiter still, and without a word, foils under his arm, he turned into the house, and no doubt it was sheer coincidence that both men seemed to forget their solemn, inevitable hand-shake.

I heard them later saying "Good-night," and the dinner apparently had restored to the full the husband's ruffled calm, for his voice was as friendly as ever as he gave his friend rendezvous for the Sunday following.

"*Pour me venger!*" I heard him call after him with a little half-protesting laugh, and I saw "Madame's" hand slip into her husband's grasp and his arm go round her waist as they passed like a pair of lovers in the gloaming up the red gravel path, and were swallowed up in the light of the porch beyond.

Next day business called me away out of Paris across the narrow Manche, and it was nearly three long weeks before I sat in my favourite chair again and blew fanciful wreaths of smoke out through the open window.

At the first glance everything seemed unchanged in my neighbour's territory, but slowly it dawned upon me that the garden was not the same.

There were weeds—real high weeds, you could count them!—in the red gravel path, a dead branch of roses hung untended from the porch, and the arbour—the desecration almost hurt me!—was full of cobwebs.

Heedless of work, I watched, all that glorious July morning, but never a glimpse of my dainty lady in pink did I catch.

The white villa had a forlorn and dismal look, and the curtains and blinds within, but lately so spick and span, hung anyhow, unkempt.

Towards the afternoon a figure appeared at the open door, and my hopes rose with a touch of real excitement only to be dashed once more.

It was "Monsieur," wrapped in a light overcoat, tightly buttoned over his narrow chest, a small portmanteau in the one hand and the inevitable lawyer's letter-case in the other.

He walked straight down the weedy path, through the green-painted gate, and on into the Avenue Victor Hugo, but he never turned his head, and no one waved from the deserted porch.

The breeze stirred among the few thin trees, bending the stripling laburnum against the dusty branches of the parched lilac bush, and somewhere on the left a dog chafed at the monotony of its kennel and whimpered distressfully.

A strange spirit of foreboding, a sense of latent mystery, took possession of me, and played havoc with my nervous imagination.

What did it all mean? And where was she?—the genius of the garden, the dainty, fair "Madame"?

(Continued on page 34)

Long I sat by my open window, and as the twilight fell and deepened into night I heard a footfall on the twisting path, the light click of the gate as it opened gently, and a dark figure appeared hesitating in the shadows of the lilac bush in my neighbour's garden.

Through the open porch came a tiny ray of light, the door closed, and then another figure, muffled mysterious, stepped down noiselessly on to the gravel path, and my ears, ever intent, caught a murmur that framed itself into words.

"*C'est toi, Armand?*"

The man moved forward eagerly, hands outstretched, from the shadow of the trees, and the next moment I heard "*Madame*" give a little sob of relief as the strong arms drew her into the shelter of the dusty arbour.

I did not see her again until the Sunday following.

"*Monsieur*" had returned, and somehow things seemed better.

A grey-bloused youth weeded the path and clipped the long, rank grass, while the *bonne* polished the rustic seat with strong, bare arms, and straightened roughly the tumbled curtains within.

"*Monsieur*" sat in the arbour with his paper, rolling his quick-smoked cigarettes, and "*Madame*" slipped past him with a half-careless, half-anxious wave of her hand on her way to morning Mass.

She walked so swiftly up the curving path that it was rather intuition than actual observation which suggested to me that the colour had gone out of her pretty face, and her shoulders looked frail and slighter than of old under the transparent muslin gown.

The air was heavy with thunder. From the copper skies above to the parched earth below all Nature was longing for the storm.

Not a leaf moved nor a bird stirred, and still the depression grew.

It was cooler indoors than out, but I noticed as I took my accustomed post of vantage after lunch that "*Monsieur*" was already in the garden, pacing up and down the narrow grass-plot restlessly, and that on the rustic seat in the little arbour were the foils, bright in their steely brightness, even under the cloudy skies.

Punctually at two the gate opened, and Armand appeared.

His face was pale and drawn with great shadows under the keen, blue eyes; all the pretty conceit, the knowledge of his handsome personality seemed to have deserted him, but he strode up to "*Monsieur*" manfully with a strange, new touch of determination in his expression.

For a moment neither spoke; then the older man handed him his foil, with a low, ironic bow.

"*À vous, Monsieur!*" He picked up his own with precision, tested the blade, and then with a touch of dramatic feeling, too obviously real to be absurd, he tore off the button guarding the sharp point, and threw it on the ground.

The other imitated his action with the same quiet fury, and in silence they took their places.

The feeling that I ought to interfere, to call "police" and "murder!" and other inanities never even occurred to me!

Here were two men and a woman—and they should fight it out to the death!—I would stand by and see fair play.

Their blades crossed—then flashed out with the sharp click of the thrust parried, and the next moment the door of the porch burst open, and a slender figure in pink rushed down towards them, and threw herself desperately between the two men.

"*Mon Dieu . . . mon Dieu!*" she cried. That was all, but her eyes were riveted on the murderous points of the foils.

Instinctively—almost unconsciously, with that innate courtesy that is the birthright of every Frenchman—"Monsieur" lowered his foil, and the younger man unwillingly stepped back a space.

The husband was speaking now softly through set teeth, and I could feel the lash of his tongue, stinging, merciless, by the mere expression on his livid countenance.

The figure in pink cowered before him, her face half hidden in her trembling hands, then, at some evident insult, too sweeping to be borne, drew herself up boldly and defied him.

Slowly, with an ugly smile, he raised the shining blade, but with a sudden gesture she turned to the other man, holding out imploringly her slim, white fingers, whilst her lips moved pathetically,

A gleam of light from the parting clouds fell on his troubled, handsome face, and I saw pride, irresolution, and the lust of blood stamped upon it, and then as she leaned towards him, pleading, little hands timidly outstretched, the tears on her pale cheeks, love came, triumphant, sweeping all before it in the one great overpowering emotion; and, silently, proudly almost, as a victor in the tournament lays his spear and shield at the feet of the Queen of Beauty, he handed her the foil.

She gave a little sob, a pent-up cry of relief, but "*Monsieur*" beside her laughed—a laugh that was not good to hear.

"Coward!"

The word rang out in the thundery air, and almost before it reached me I guessed its import by the look on young Armand's face.

For a moment, I thought, all unarmed as he was, he would have sprung at the other's throat, but two weak arms clung round him, and I saw her red lips moving, imploring, beseeching.

His blue eyes met hers desperately. "Let me kill him?" they begged, but she burst into a flood of frightened tears, laying her golden head against his arm—that strong, defenceless right arm that should have proven him in very sooth no weakling!

And "*Monsieur's*" mood changed suddenly as he watched the pair, and he flung the rapier behind him, where it fell and clattered against the step of the little arbour; then pointed to the gate.

"*Va-t-en!*" he ordered through set lips.

Then came the unforgiveable word, and as though at a signal from the earth beneath, the storm broke above their heads.

The rain lashed down, tearing the roses and creepers before it, the thunder rolled in echo after echo round the distant Bois, and a great flash of lightning flickered in blue zig-zags across the sullen sky.

But "*Madame's*" steady courage rose superior to the scene.

With a firm step she walked down towards the little wicket-gate, the gate where in the good old days she would stand, dainty red shoes and all, and wave a last

kiss gaily to her husband as he paused in the curving path, to raise his hat with a last whispered *au revoir*.

Steadily she lifted the latch, and without a word passed out into the common pathway.

Her wet dress clung to her shoulders, and her golden hair, drenched with rain, hung in a long, wet lock over her white forehead, but she held her little head defiantly erect.

With one last look of regret at the foil that lay behind him half buried in the soaking grass Armand turned and followed, and in silence the two passed for ever out of my life up the twisting path.

For a moment "Monsieur" stood where they had left him, bareheaded, heedless of the storm, and his face in the clearing light looked drawn and grey and strangely expressionless.

I saw his gaze fall on the foil before him, then travel slowly to the other by the step, and so on into the little arbour, scene of many a happy hour in the life that now was dead; then, turning with an effort, he tottered into the house, and it struck me with a sudden touch of compassion that his walk was the walk of an old, old man!

The storm raged throughout the night. The wind howled and the thunder rumbled like the distant rattle of a Gatling as I tossed about in bed, thinking of the tragedy I had witnessed in the evening. Once the sudden report was so sharp I could have declared it was a gun, but the lightning still flickered in at my window, and I turned over, smiling at my folly, and fell asleep.

It was broad daylight when I awoke, and the sun was pouring in in a glory of golden haze, and I saw beyond, over the tops of the glistening trees, the blue of a July sky.

I sat up sleepily as the *bonne* brought me my morning coffee and roll.

"What a night!" I suggested in answer to her greeting, and promptly she took up my conversational cue.

"Ah! but yes, Monsieur," she said; "indeed, a night!—but there is worse than the storm."

She threw out her hands sideways with a quick gesture of horror, and I saw she was bubbling over with a piece of sensational news.

"What is it?" I asked, with a lazy smile. I knew her weakness for the doings of her neighbours, and the stormy political outbursts of the cheaper papers.

"*Ce pauvre, Monsieur!*" she explained in her incoherent way. "It is too sad, *mon Dieu* . . . that such things should be!"

I was wide awake by now, and a sudden intuition came to me as she went on volubly.

"*Il s'est suicidé, le pauvre*—they say he had trouble—ah, but a great trouble!—*une affaire de famille*—and in the night he shot himself." She drew back the curtains and pulled the blind still higher. "*Tiens!* Monsieur can see the house from here—the little white one with the arbour in the corner of the garden."

She threw up the sash to its full height, and concluded.

"If Monsieur will but look—*tout droit*—out through the open window."

MURIEL HINE.



Photograph

Miss Edith Evans as Julietta in "Tales of Hoffman"

Dover Street Studios

She is appearing as Ursule in Richard Strauss's *Feuersnot* on July 9, produced by the Thomas Beecham Opera Comique Company at His Majesty's Theatre



"THE BYSTANDER"

SHORT · STORY

LOVE'S WEB

By STEPHEN SAINT

EVERY man at one time in his life looks down the barrel of a loaded revolver and fingers the trigger. Some men cannot afford the weapon, but they go through the process mentally. Many a razor has been handled of sin prepense by a white-lipped, shivering fellow, who is to-day gold-drunk and brain-proud. All of us have contemplated suicide before we have reached the age of thirty. If we have not, then there is something sickeningly wrong with our pathway and the decoration of its walls and shop-windows.

Arthur Lechear was a man around whom joy scintillated, happiness flashed, and luck glowed with an eternal fervour. He had a small fortune—at least, they call such sums small at Coutts—he filled his clothes well, and was sufficiently ugly to look exceedingly handsome in evening dress. He was well-born, the second son of a peer with big shootings, and had done really well in a scholastic and social sense at Eton and Cambridge.

On his twenty-eighth birthday he lay on a couch in a private sitting-room in a Cairo hotel. The table had just been cleared of his luncheon dishes, and he was smoking a long, thin cigar that gave forth a peculiarly sleepy and heavy smoke. His feet rested on the arm of the couch, and his head lay on a pillow. On his knees lay a bunch of papers, at which he did not seem to want to look.

Presently another man entered the room, and flung himself into an armchair by Lechear's couch. He was a youthful-looking fellow, with a good colour, fine physique, and businesslike nose and lips. There was excitement in his manner.

"Well, Tommy, what have you found out?" asked Lechear, lazily.

Tommy Aykrell was Lechear's private secretary—at a good salary, and boon companion—at some loss to his own inordinate self-respect.

"It's the queerest story," confessed Aykrell. "You'll hardly believe me when I tell you."

"Fire ahead."

"Well, you know where, how, and when you met this girl?"

Lechear waved his hand impatiently.

"Well, when I recognised her first at dinner last night I very naturally suspected that she had followed you here. You were so obviously impressed in Paris that the girl, if she were an adventuress playing for big game, would think nothing of following you from

France to Egypt. Well, she hasn't followed you here. On the contrary, she thinks that you and I have followed her."

"Nonsense!"

"Let me explain. I found her in the drawing-room, which was empty, save for a knitting, deaf, and elderly spinster, who sat in the opposite corner to the fair unknown, whose name, by the way, is Mrs. Galloway."

"How do you know that? Are you sure she's married?"

"Don't be impatient. Well, I walked quietly up to Mrs. Galloway, leant over her shoulder, and said, 'I hardly expected to find you here.' She turned very white. She didn't turn to look at me. I thought for a moment that she was going to faint. Then in very even, quiet tones she said, 'Ah, you've caught me, have you? Where is your warrant?'"

"Tommy, what on earth are you inventing for my amusement now?"

"Nothing. She asked for my warrant. I said, 'I beg your pardon.' No one on earth would have thought of anything else to say. Then she looked at me. And she is exceedingly pleasing when she raises her eyes, Arthur. A look of great relief crossed her entirely charming face, and she said, half smilingly, 'Why, I thought you must be a detective—'"

"A what, Tommy?"

"A detective. Nothing more. She thought that I was a detective. Can you finish the word? If a woman, mistaking you for a detective, asks for your warrant, I think you may fairly assume that she has put you down as a detective. What do you say?"

"Marvellous!"

Tommy stroked the hair at the back of his skull and looked gratified.

"But let me tell you the rest. Immediately she failed to finish the word, my brain sprung into instant action. I almost interrupted her, so quickly did I come to a decision to play a bold game."

"Hurry it up."

"I said to her, 'Oh, no, I'm not a detective, but aren't you rather unwise to travel as you do?' That was non-committal, wasn't it, Arthur? I did not accuse her, but the question might mean much to a guilty person, a fugitive from justice. It might draw from her a—"

"Oh, Lordy, Lordy, you're boring me, Tommy, and

worrying me, too. I shall go to her and ask for the story in a minute."

"Impossible. You will understand in a moment. Her reply to me was very nervously given. She said, 'Then you know me? Why haven't you exposed me?' I shrugged my shoulders. 'Why should I?' I replied. 'It is not my business. Let the detectives do their own dirty work.' She said that it was very good of me, and asked if I thought others had recognised her. I said, 'A few, probably—none, possibly!' Then she shrugged her shoulders, resignedly, I thought. Extraordinarily pretty shoulders, Arthur, I grant you. Presently she asked me if I believed all that had been in the papers, and if you also believed it."

"Ah, she asked what I thought, did she?"

"Yes. I told her that neither of us had read much about the case, and we scarcely remembered the details. Then came the revealing statement. She said, 'You may take it from me that the whole of the story about the forged cheques is an abominable lie.' I must say I winced in my chair."

"Good Heavens! You don't mean that she's——! And yet the likeness is remarkable. But Mrs. Tempest was dark, and this girl is fair."

"Dye."

"Awful! Awful! A lovely, frail little creature like that."

Lecheare was shocked to the heart. His passion for this charming hotel acquaintance was genuine. He had met her in Paris, and though Aykrell did not know it, he had followed her to Cairo, whither he had learned from an hotel attendant she was travelling. Now it had been brought home to him rudely and abruptly that the woman who had filled his thoughts for every hour of the past thirty days was—wanted for murder.

Mrs. Tempest's portrait was in every illustrated paper in the globe. She had shot her husband in cold blood, locked the body up in the flat, and, moving into a West-End hotel, for a week had changed cheques for big sums on her husband's banking account. All the cheques, so the newspapers stated, were considered forgeries by the bank authorities, when the discovery of the body drew attention to them. The cashier who paid out the moneys was exonerated from blame, but it was, nevertheless, felt that the signatures were, nay, must have been, forgeries. They were exactly like Mr. Tempest's, the manager admitted, but, by some obscure process of reasoning, he had arrived at the decision that Mr. Tempest had never written them. Mrs. Tempest had left the hotel when the crime was discovered, and had completely vanished. Her early arrest was certain, but here she was at Cairo unsuspected by any but Lecheare and his secretary.

Lecheare walked up and down the room. His face was flaming, his heart and pulse beating at a violent rate.

"Tommy, this is ghastly."

"It is."

"Poor little girl, poor little girl."

"Don't get too sentimental about it, Arthur. It's a dangerous business."

"Dangerous? Damn the danger. I'm going to see her."

Aykrell jumped up and placed a restraining hand on his employer's arm.

"Be careful, Arthur. Think the matter over calmly before you have anything further to do with her. No woman is worth such a risk."

"Rubbish. She's in trouble, poor little darling. I'm going to stick to her. I'll save her if I can. I'll swear her husband was a blackguard."

"Arthur, for God's sake, sit down and be reasonable. What are you going to do? What can you do?"

"Tommy, I'm going to protect her. I'm going to carry her away where the law can't reach her, if she will come with me."

"You can't protect her. You can't save her. She will be found in the end."

"Well?"

"Then, my dear Arthur, you will stand by her side in the dock, accused of harbouring and protecting a fugitive from justice. You may even be accused of being an accessory after the crime."

"I don't care, I don't care. I love her, and I'll save her if it's humanly possible."

"It isn't humanly possible. I give you six months, a year if you like, but she'll be caught in the end, and you with her."

"Then I'll share her fate. Tommy, go away, go away, and let me think."

Tommy would have spoken again, but he saw a look in Lecheare's face that bade him keep silence. He went quietly from the room.

Outside the door Aykrell's expression changed. Over the boyish, frank face came a look of intense cunning and not a little shame. He made his way to his bedroom, and collected a number of newspapers. With them he made himself comfortable in an easy chair.

A sum of £1,000 was offered by Mr. Tempest's relatives for the apprehension of his murderer. It flamed from the newspapers into Tommy's starting eyes. One thousand pounds! Lecheare, his employer, was going to harbour this woman. He knew it. Lecheare was going to endeavour to conceal her. He was now thinking about it, and Tommy knew perfectly well what his decision would be. What did that mean? It meant that within a very short space of time Lecheare would be socially damned. It meant that within the space of a few short months Tommy's employer would be arrested in Mrs. Tempest's company. He knew Lecheare's nature, that he would stick to the woman through thick and thin. That meant that Lecheare would be prosecuted and in all probability convicted. His, Aykrell's, employment would be gone. He would have to find a new opening. One thousand pounds was one thousand pounds. What was Lecheare to him? His employer; nothing more. A good friend he had been, but there were limits. With Lecheare a convict, he would be stranded. One thousand pounds would help him into new employment. It would cover the time during which he was searching for a fresh opportunity.

Presently Aykrell took pen and paper, and wrote a letter. Then he addressed an envelope to those who were most interested in the detection of Mrs. Tempest's hiding-place.

Arthur Lecheare did not spend long in thought. He was soon in the drawing-room. Mrs. Galloway, as she chose to call herself, was gone. Lecheare inquired

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of the servants, and found that his troubled idol was in her bedroom. He sent up his card with a brief message scribbled on it, and was soon admitted into a sitting-room adjoining her boudoir.

She lay in a bewitching *peignoir* on a low divan. More of her shoulders and breast and stockings were exposed than should have been the case with a woman of the world, notwithstanding the heat, and to a less ardent lover, the daring sensuousness of her clothes and ribbons would have been objectionable. But Lecheare had no eyes in his passion. It was sufficient that he was again on his knees by her side.

"Darling," he said, and he kissed the hand that hung limply from the couch. "Mr. Aykrell has told me what you said. I understand. I forgive, if it is my privilege to forgive. But you aren't safe, dear. Come with me. I asked for you in Paris when I did not know. I know now, but still I ask you to come. I will protect you, save you. Come!"

She turned her body and her lovely head. Her face sank into a silken cushion. She sobbed, and her body shook in a convulsion of agony.

Lecheare was so profoundly moved that words died on his lips. He bent and kissed her hair, begged her to master herself and speak to him. He shuddered as he looked down on the frail, trembling little body, and remembered that death by hanging might be its fate.

She turned at last, and looked up at him with swimming, violet eyes.

It was the face of a child. An unhappy, beautiful child. Her mouth was firm, and protested innocence. Her eyes were as clear and sinless as the depth of an unseen sky. The chin and forehead were eloquent of nobility of character. Surely never anything so monstrous as that this gracious human flower should be hunted for murder.

"Darling, say you will come. I will take you away to-night, on the Nile. We will float away where they will least think of seeking you, where there will be no one with prying eyes to render you nervous. I will comfort you, dear. You will forget. I will make you forget."

The girl thought while she cried. She had once laid in this keen, strong young Englishman's arms in Paris when he did not know her secret. Now he knew, and still he wanted her. She had denied him then because of his ignorance. The barrier no longer stood in the way. Why should she refuse his help now?

Her agony of doubt did not last long. She put out her tiny hand, ablaze with rings. She drew his face to within an inch of hers.

"I will come with you, Arthur," she said. "And God bless you." The breath from her lips as she spoke caressed his mouth.

That night they stole away up the Nile in a dahabeeah. Aykrell knew nothing of it until the following day, when this note was given to him by the manager of the hotel.

"I enclose a cheque for six months' salary. Before that period expires, I will communicate with you. Stay at the Continental, Paris.—ARTHUR."

The boat trip was an ecstasy for one, perhaps for both. The beauty of the little girl whose charge he

had undertaken entranced Arthur Lecheare. He would sit and watch her while she slept. Then he would look into the depths of the violet skies, ablaze with diamond stars, and back from them, with a superior smile, at the lovely little creature he was shielding from the fury of the world. He was immensely, grossly happy.

The girl appeared to revel in his affection and constant solicitude. No word of the ghastly tragedy that had marred her life was breathed between them, and on the silent reaches of the river, between the monuments and relics of ages long forgot, nothing occurred to disturb their peace of mind. Sometimes when her features were in repose, they assumed a hunted expression, but Lecheare devoted himself to her constant entertainment.

It was, perhaps, after ten days' happy journeying that the first little jar occurred. She had suggested a little boredom with the monotony of the trip. She thought they might turn back again and dare the light of capitals, or, at least, the flickering gleam of quiet towns. The suggestion filled Lecheare with terror—more, it must be said, in justice to him, for her than for himself. He knew that the hunt would not be given up for many a long day, and, moreover, he, quite rightly, distrusted Aykrell. He confided his misgivings to his beloved companion, but she laughed at them, and rather petulantly demanded if he intended for ever treating her as a stowaway.

Lecheare was hurt, but he gave way. The boat's head was turned, and they sailed, in Lecheare's profound conviction, straight for the gates of prison.

On the following night Lecheare sat in the cabin with the girl. She was in a bad humour, and his kisses met with no response. He begged her to tell him the cause of her annoyance, but she shrugged her shoulders.

"You are foolish, Myra," he said. "I could save you, and we should always be happy."

"I wonder about that," she drawled. "I think I would rather experience the excitement of arrest than be bored. I don't mean that you bore me, dear, but this boat and the ghastly river are dreadful. I'm sick of the stars. I want to see lamps again and electric light. This boat is so terribly small. Life is no good to me unless something is happening. Strong sensations I want. I must have them. I should like to hate someone sufficiently to start a vendetta, and then hunt him, and catch him, and—. Oh, this ghastly little cabin!"

She threw up her hands and her lovely mouth tightened.

"You are hysterical, dear. The agony of mind you have endured has slightly upset your sense of balance. You no more want to hunt than to be hunted."

"I do! I do! I am mad to hunt. I've got that instinct in my blood. And I'm not a sportswoman, far from it. Do you know, as a child of nine, I killed a cat—a great big cat it was, and wanted killing. I have shot one hundred pigeons let loose from a trap in an afternoon, not in a competition, but because I—. But you would never understand. You like peaceful things. We should never be happy together."

"That is unfair and ungrateful, Myra."

"I know—but frankly, Arthur, you would bore me." She yawned as if to point her statement. Pettishly

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he left her and went up into the bows of the boat and watched the shore as it glided past.

Presently he felt sleepy, and wanted to return to the cabin. But obstinately he decided to sleep on deck, and bidding a man fetch some cushions he stretched himself out, close to the side. He was so close that his position was almost dangerous.

An hour later, the girl ran from the bows of the boat, and shouted to the steersman.

"Quick, quick," she screamed, "he has fallen overboard." And then she fainted.

Arthur Lechear's body was found some days later, mutilated by crocodiles.

On the evening of his death, Mrs. Galloway searched his papers, and for some time practised his signature with his fountain pen. Under the fine linen of her ribboned chemisette Lechear's cheque-book warmly reposed on her girlish breast. STEPHEN SAINT.

GREETING OR FAREWELL

If Life be eternal as love,
I shall see you to-night.
Be our meeting below or above,
In the dark or the light.
I shall see you. My darling will know
Ere the dawning be wan,
That the love of my life bids me go
On the road you have gone.

A year has crept into the day
Since you kissed me, and said,
"Sweetheart! Do you love me?" Then pray
For the life that is dead.
For the life that is dead, and is born
In a new world to-night.
You *will* come to me? Come in the morn,
When the dawning is bright.

Ah! Darling! I come to you blind!
In the dark or the light?
I know not. My sight is confined
To the imminent night.
But the love of my life that I know
Bids me haste to be gone.
I leap in the dark. But I go!—
Let the coward stay on.

Love laughs at the lie that Death lied,
When I saw my love dead,
"I will hasten to steal to your side,"
Were the words that I said.
And the love that in this world was born
Will be with you to-night.
Good-night. I shall see you ere morn.
In the dark or the light?

JAS. BLYTH.



"AUTUMN": A PHOTOGRAPHIC STUDY BY MRS. K. HAENEL

Phemie Gilchrist

By MARJORIE BOWEN
Author of "The Viper of Milan," etc.

A TRADITIONARY TALE OF THE COVENANTERS

[NOTICE TO READERS.—This story, by the talented young author of "*The Viper of Milan*" and other historical novels, is on entirely different lines from the generality of BYSTANDER short stories, which have dealt almost entirely with modern life. In view, however, of the discussion now proceeding with our readers on the question of short stories in general, the moment is not inopportune to publish one of a different character.—ED.]

PHEMIE GILCHRIST hastened as gentle-footed as a deer through the remote valley lying in a cleft of the great Lowther Hills, in Lanarkshire, which had always been her home.

It was August, and the lark was singing, while the summit of Lowther glowed bright in the full rays of mid-day, the bee clung to the frail hare-bells or buzzed among the heather, the patient flocks were placid on the emerald slopes, in the wide azure was no cloud, in the serene stillness no discord, but Phemie Gilchrist looked to right and left, now hastened her steps and now checked them, like a guilty creature; sometimes pressing her hand to her bosom and pausing, sometimes gazing fearfully over her shoulder as if the peaceful loveliness was full of terror.

Presently the valley broadened, and was traversed by a fair stream of running water; Phemie followed this a little way, then crossed on the wide, white stepping-stones, carefully, for she carried, half concealed in her dark blue and green plaid, a basket covered with fine calendered linen.

A few steps farther brought her to a ruined, roofless church, and a small graveyard sloping to the very edge of the rivulet; a low stone wall surrounded it. The gate had long gone; through the bramble-choked aperture where it had once been Phemie entered, and stood, hesitating and cautious, among the graves.

It was a sweet scene, if desolate. Here grew the rowan, and here drooped the ash, honeysuckle climbed about the defaced stones and shed fragrance on the mountain air; on the broken wall sprouted wallflowers, paddow-pipe long grass, snapdragon, and the wild eglantine, blossomless now, but glossy green.

In the roofless church the linnet and the thrush had built their nests, and there the owl lurked by day; the branches of the ash brushed the empty window-frames with a melancholy movement, and cast their long shadows over the leaning headstones half-hidden in the lush, flowering grass.

Behind were the great mountains and the greater sky, and all about loneliness save for the presence of the flocks, and silence save for the murmur of the bees and the gurgle of the stream.

Phemie Gilchrist set her basket on a moss-covered tombstone, and clapped her hands together, timidly; twice, like a signal.

"Elphin!" she cried, in a voice that swelled and echoed in the pass. "Elphin!"

There was a rustle in the grass, a parting of the ash boughs, and a tall, pale young man, wrapped in a torn plaid, came from the interior of the church.

With a cry of pleasure she ran to him, kissed him with a generous warmth, and clasped his thin hands to her bosom.

"Art thou come back to Lowther, Elphin Gilchrist, an outlaw with a price upon thy head!" she cried; "and must I minister to thee in secret who would so joyfully receive thee with honour!"

He pressed her to his heart, and cast a wild eye round the solitude.

"So it is, Phemie," he answered; "for twelve days I have hid in the heather with the curlew for company, lain with the reeds above my head and the paddow-pipe brushing my cheek, cold with the dews of night, and sick with the fever of the moor morass, armed men behind me—and no place of refuge, no hope save in thy heart, my kind sister!"

"Elphin! Elphin! this is a sad home-coming—in this ruin where the hoodie crow gathers and the fox lurks and the eagle shrieks above," she looked round at the graves. "Yestereve I found my window broken and thy message tied to a stone—no sooner could I come without rousing wonder—oh, Elphin! what must we do?"

Elphin Gilchrist sank on to a high, square, sunken tomb and, removing his bonnet, pressed his hand to his forehead with an air of exhaustion. Phemie hastened to fetch her basket, and on the ancient sepulchre spread the fugitive's meal that she had carried so far up the valley.

"It was a shepherd who threw that stone, Phemie; an honest man, who fed me—one of the pious remnant—he told me of a number of Whigs hidden in Clydesdale—I know the place, but I can never reach it without a horse—"

She marked the effort with which he spoke, and tenderly pressed him to eat; as she poured his wine and cut his bread, her hood fell back and revealed the rich locks confined in the maiden's silken snood; the soft features, flushed with the rosy hue of youth; the innocent blue eyes that made Phemie Gilchrist among the fairest maids in Lanarkshire; in the worn countenance of the young man, to which the wine brought a returning glow of health, might be traced the likeness to her sweet face that showed them to be of one family.

She sat at his feet in the high grass, and watched him eat and drink.

"Elphin," she said, "why did you not come home? You were ever the darling of our mother's heart, and our father would never have refused you shelter."

He set down his horn cup, and his cheek darkened

and his eye flashed with the ardour of the enthusiast.

"Is not our father a faint-hearted believer? One who always shirked his duty, never put his shoulder to the wheel of the Covenant, one who forsook God's Kirk in the hour of distress, and entered the safe ranks of Episcopacy?"

The tears gathered in her eyes.

"Still, you are his son."

"I am a lowly forwarder of the great cause," answered the young man with increasing firmness, "and as such will be indebted to no oppressor, no upholder of the false kirk and the false King, even if he be my father. Did I not go forth into the desert, forsaking my birthright to dwell among the outcast, sooner than live with them that believe not?"

Phemie Gilchrist drooped her head until her ringlets touched the swaying grass.

"Besides," continued her brother in a milder tone, "I would not endanger my mother and you. There is severe punishment for those who shelter the proscribed—God grant that no harm may come to you, Phemie, for this charity."

She lifted her blue orbs with the drops of love and pity in them, and gazed into his face.

"Tell me what I can do, my Elphin, the pleasure of service outweighs the dread of punishment."

He lightly touched her blowing hair and tender cheek.

"I would that you," he said gently, "could be confirmed and made steadfast in the truth."

The maiden blenched.

"Oh, Elphin! I do fear God and worship, and each night I pray for the safety of the true kirk, but to leave home and go forth an outcast as thou hast done! I have not the courage, Elphin, and it would break our mother's heart."

"Dear lass," he answered, "thou art a good angel wherever thy feet be set, nor is it for weak women to defend the Covenant, but for us, the men."

"Tell me," she repeated, "what I must do."

"If you could bring a stout horse here at sundown with a little bread and water at his saddle, I would ask no more of you, my Phemie; under cover of the dark I could ride out of the western outlet of the glen, and make my way to join the brethren in Clydeshire, who are strong now."

"Is there no danger for you in this?" she asked fearfully. "Are you not safer in hiding?"

Elphin Gilchrist smiled sadly.

"There are spies everywhere; even now it may be known that I am concealed here, the troopers are in pursuit, and if I am caught there is nothing for Elphin Gilchrist but the torture and the hempen rope in the Grassmarket."

"I can bring the horse," she answered eagerly, "—and without remark, my own Highland mare, a good beast—but how comes it, Elphin, that after near a year of security you are suddenly in this pass?"

His eye glanced fire and his dark cheek flushed.

"I was preaching the word of the Lord to my fellow Christians, on our native rocks beneath our native sky, when the armed men rode down among us, fresh from the slaughter of Pentland they were, and they hacked and hewed among the fearless, helpless supporters of the true kirk like devils at their work!"

As he spoke, Elphin Gilchrist rose from his sombre seat, and clenched his hand to his bosom.

"The bloody Bonshaw's men, false, black, and cruel—I was unarmed, but I took a claymore from one of the yet warm dead—an officer levelled his carbine at one of my wounded flock, and *him* I struck down."

"Alas!" said Phemie, and the tears over-brimmed her eyes.

"When they saw the gentleman cavalier fall they rushed at me, but I snatched up his pistol and fled. You know how I can run, Phemie? The fleetest foot in Lanarkshire they used to say I distanced them and took to paths they knew not of—" he paused, then added sternly, "I am glad I struck down the oppressor, even though I shall scarcely escape the vengeance of the wrong-doers—"

Phemie Gilchrist laid her pale face against the slanting edge of the tomb, stray rays of sun parted the ash bought and touched to glinting gold her locks.

"Was he killed?" she asked.

Her brother looked at her swiftly.

"Why, thy cheek hath changed colour, Phemie!" he raised her, and added, "the cavalier was not slain, my lass."

She shuddered in his arms.

"Think me not weak and foolish, my Elphin; but the times are bloody and wild; even with the blue heaven overhead and the sweet lark in it, singing, I feel my heart beat to a death march, and my warm blood run chill in my veins! Oh, dreadful are the days and dismal the nights that lower now over our dear land, and too terrible these terrors for the heart of poor Phemie Gilchrist to bear!"

Whereat she wept piteously, hiding her face on his plaid, and he made attempt to comfort; after a while she put him from her and smiled wildly.

"Listen to me, Elphin Gilchrist; when you spoke just now of shedding the blood of a cavalier gentleman I was full of fear and bitterness—for 'tis to such an one that I have given my heart!"

He stepped back against the ash tree and surveyed her sternly.

"To a man such as he—a heathenish recusant!"

She clasped her hands, pleadingly.

"'Tis an English dragoon, Elphin, who was quartered with Maxwell the laird. Oh, but he is gentle and hateth this bloody work, and for my sake will leave it when we are man and wife—"

"Is he one of Bonshaw's men?"

"No—he hath his own company; forgive me, Elphin—"

"He is one of the persecutors! My sister hath plighted her troth to such an one!"

The young Covenanter looked grim and dark.

"Forgive me, Elphin," she repeated.

"Forgive you! Is it for me, a proscribed fugitive, who oweth life to you to judge; yet sore am I grieved that Phemie Gilchrist should have plighted her maiden vows to a tyrant Episcopalian."

She raised her eyes and hands in pleading, and with a gentle strength in her voice answered:

"By this ground, still consecrate and holy, by yon high hills that first dawned upon our awed and infant gaze, he whom I love is no evil man!"

Her brother's stern features relaxed; he laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"Difficult would it be to believe that anything evil could win thy heart, Phemie!"

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She pressed his hand in silent gratitude.

"An Englishman?" asked the Covenanter.

"Yes, Elphin."

"What is his name, that if we chance to meet I may know him?"

"God grant," she said, "that you may never meet! His name is Frank Hawkins."

Her brother sighed.

"It is like enough we might meet, when I am one of the hunted and he is one of the hunters!"

"Oh, say not so, my Elphin, speak words of good omen—and he doth not now persecute the followers of the Covenant. Many days ago he rode, with his men, to Edinburgh, there to hold converse with the Mackenzie for gentle means to end these troubles."

Elphin Gilchrist put her from him; his brow lowered and his lip paled.

"Bloody Mackenzie is a bonnie friend for my sister's lover. How shall I, when I exhort the staunch and faithful to patience, endurance, and steadfast courage, how shall I link curses to the names of the oppressors among whom my own sister hath found a mate?"

She smiled through a mist of tears and clung to him.

"These times will pass, my beloved, the good days are coming, be assured, when all will live together in comfort and holiness; when the true Kirk will be free and the bigot discomfited! Never think that Frank Hawkins doth not long for those days even as thou—but he must obey his King as thou thy God, even though the service be distasteful."

The young minister shook his head.

"These arguments are the vain toys of affection, Phemie; but I who know you good and leal and innocent, I who owe everything to your charity will not utter one word of blame. Nay, if Frank Hawkins should ever cross my path, I would hold his person sacred for thy sake."

"God bless you, dear! Oh, we shall be happy yet! Now I must go—"

"Can you not stay a little? This is a sweet though melancholy spot. Hark how the stream maketh music, and see how the ash bough waveth in unison. Would not this be a pretty place to die, with the faeries, the hoochie crow, and the owl for mourners?"

"Elphin! I must go—it is a long way up the glen, and I have to saddle the mare and pack the basket—"

"Ay," he said, reluctantly; "but it would be sweet if we could sit as we used to, telling tales of Sir James of the Rose and how he fought a dozen men!"

They had paced the length of the graveyard and come out on to the lonely glenside, and there they embraced and parted on her solemn vow to return before sun-down with the horse for his escape.

With yearning eyes the fugitive watched the gentle figure pass down the slope and over the stream, turning now and then to flutter a white kerchief, watched her until her dark plaid was lost amid the heather patches and the shadows of the great mountain had closed over the waved signal.

He sat awhile on the low wall listening to those sweet inner sounds that are only heard in perfect solitude; the drone of the insect, the tap of the blossom against the stone, the murmur of a little breeze in the boughs, the rustle of the bending grass.

Far away on the hills was the remote tinkle of a

sheep-bell, intermittent and plaintive, and near, the dry rustle of the harebell growing on a fragile stem out of the broken wall.

The fish plashed in the stream, the eagle circled over the distant mountains, a speck in the clear blue, the lizard ran out over the warm stone, the lark sang above the ruined church, and still Elphin Gilchrist sat motionless among the ancient graves.

Then, as shadows lengthened from yew and ash, and sunken tombstone, he rose and packed up the basket ready for Phemie to take back, brushed his bonnet, and put on the shoes he had removed to ease his swollen feet, then took a small Bible from his pocket, and under the shade of the holy ruins read how faith saved Daniel, even from the maw of the lion.

As he closed the book he recalled, as by an inspiration of the Lord, that he was not wholly unarmed.

The pistol of the oppressor was still in his possession; he entered the church and picked it up from the clump of wallflowers where he had flung it when he had first dropped exhausted in the shelter of the solemn walls.

It was a fine weapon, mounted in silver and still loaded, for Elphin Gilchrist had no occasion to use it; he handled it now cautiously, but with a grim satisfaction, and recalled without pity the fair-haired prone figure from whose slack hand he had snatched the weapon.

An owl stirred in one of the dark arches of the church as if making ready to fly abroad now that the sun had set behind the mountains, the laverock fell to his evening song, and the purple shades of evening crept up the glen, as the young minister came again to the graveyard wall to watch for his sister coming up the pass.

He made to unfasten his plaid to fix the pistol again in his belt, and as he laid the weapon on the wall his eye was caught by some carving on the butt.

He caught it up and gazed.

Finely engraved between two mailed fists was a name.

"Frank Hawkins."

The Covenanter stared at it with eyes glaring with horror; he rubbed it with the edge of his plaid, hoping it was some devil's trick; he turned it about, looked away and looked again, but there the name still showed unmistakable—"Frank Hawkins"—his sister's lover.

He cast the thing from him at length, and breathed an agonised prayer.

"Oh, Lord! what sin hath thy servant committed that this judgment should befall him!"

He recalled all the tenderest scenes of his childhood; how he and Phemie had pulled the gowans and the wild stunted plum and the wandering rose from beside the shelves of the pools and streams of the Lowther wards; how they had sat hand in hand on some low knoll and listened to the tinkle of the bell wether, even as he listened now; he thought of how Phemie was coming joyous on her stout mare, flushed with gladness at the thought of saving him, and then before his mental vision arose a picture of a cavalier with locks southern soft and southern brown, dabbled with blood, and Elphin Gilchrist groaned aloud.

Since he had left his father's roof he had lived at a venture and a hazard and never known fear; but he was afraid now to look into the sweet face of Phemie Gilchrist.

Distracted he recalled her fair figure walking among

"PHEMIE GILCHRIST," BY MARJORIE BOWEN (*continued from page 88*)

the oat braid before the harvesting and singing a song of the faeries' cup-bearer, and was like to utter a malison on himself that ever he should bring sorrow on her gentle head.

Yet was not the fair-haired youth a servant of Bonshaw's, and could he feel remorse for cleaving such to the neck-band, a godless man, abomination in the sight of the fearful God?

He looked along the scarcely visible road that wound down the glen and dreaded, as he had before longed, to see the figure of his sister approaching.

The chafing stream made a louder noise with the rising evening winds that filled the hollows of the hills and shook the ash boughs over the desolate burial place; the lucid glow of departing day illumined with a tender clearness the carved and broken stones that marked the last bed of ancient chieftain and humble peasant.

Phemie raised his eyes to where the sunset stained the western ridge of the mountain, and his face was haggard as it had not been during all his outlawed life, then he convulsively snatched up the fatal weapon and stared again at the name of the owner—Frank Hawkins.

Then, as he listened with a horrid expectancy, he heard the sound he would have before so gladly heard, but now would have changed willingly to the clatter of armed men—the sound of a horse's soft canter along the grassy glen.

While he still stood motionless, the pistol in his hand, she came riding up, dismounted and cast the reins round the bough of a yew.

"Elphin! I am here—hath the time seemed long?"

"Very long," he answered wildly.

She entered the graveyard; her face was rosy with riding and her ringlets disordered under the snood.

"No one knoweth of my coming," she said, eager to assure him of her loyal wit; "but oh, Elphin, I was minded to tell our mother—she had heard that a company of soldiers were entering the wards of Lowther, and oh, but her heart was sore that you might be among those they hunted!"

The Covenanter stood silent; his eyes cast down to the pistol he held, and she continued.

"But I did not dare tell her you were here for fear her agitation should discover us—"

Here Phemie paused, panting and smiling.

"But when thou art safe, my Elphin, I will tell her where the good mare hath gone—into Clydesdale with thee—"

So saying she drew him gently towards the steed, who surveyed them out of her full, soft, and pitying dark eye.

"A moment, Phemie!" cried the young minister with a blanched lip. "Before I take thy succour there is something I must say."

She dropped her hand from his plaid, and closely gazed into his face.

"Thou art changed since my last coming!"

"That hath happened since thy last coming that sufficeth to change my countenance and chill my heart."

She smiled at him, thinking the solitude had wrought upon his imagination.

"Do not look so wildly, Elphin, there are no evil spirits to mumble here; this is a holy place—set thy lips to my forehead in the farewell kiss, and mount, mount and ride to Clydesdale!"

He took a step from her in the thick grass, and pressed his open hand to his bosom.

"I can neither mount nor flee until I have said what is on my mind, Phemie."

"Then hasten, my dearest, for in truth I heard that the cavalier's were riding about the wards of Lowther hunting the Whigs, and every sound seemeth to me the harness of an armed soldier—"

"Phemie," he interrupted, "what is thy lover like?"

She looked at him amazed.

"Fair—not so tall as you—not so grave—with gay eyes—"

"He wore long locks?"

Phemie smiled.

"Long locks as fine as the new-spun silk or as the fairest tresses a maid ever confined in the snood," she answered, and the deep tenderness with which she spoke was an added pang to Elphin Gilchrist.

"Listen," he said, "and judge if I shall ride your beast to Clydesdale or no—"

"Elphin!" she cried, terrified by the accent in which he spoke.

The Covenanter bent his head.

"God knoweth how hard it is for me to speak—my sister!--who taught me to weave the white-fingered rushes, who followed me up the glen side and listened so patiently to my early hopes and fears—Oh, Phemie! bitter are the words I have to say."

Her mild blue eye became dashed with moisture, she hung on his speech, and the cambric above her bosom heaved like troubled water, while a pallor not wholly due to the declining light and the mournful shade of the ash overspread her features.

"It was—" cried Elphin, with a desperate strength as if he wrenched the confession from his bosom, "it was Frank Hawkins that I struck down at out last meeting amid the heather!"

The maiden did not understand.

"Frank Hawkins!" she murmured.

"Thy English lover, Phemie! Upon the pistol snatched from his side I have seen his name—he was the cavalier gentleman I felled to the earth—"

She caught the weapon from her brother's slack hand and examined it eagerly.

"Yes, yes! this is Frank's pistol; many a time have I seen it in his belt and rubbed a spot of rust from its brightness! And did you strike him, did you say; did you raise your hand against my dear?"

Elphin Gilchrist looked her steadily in the face.

"I told you, Phemie, of the soldier I smote to the earth when the bloody military broke in upon our prayers—"

She gave a low shriek.

"And was Frank Hawkins that man?"

"He was," answered the Covenanter.

Phemie recoiled; the pistol sank against her plaid.

"Oh—my Frank! But I thought him in Edinburgh."

"He was there, with dark Bonshaw's men," returned Elphin, with a look of settled horror.

"And did you strike him?" cried Phemie frantically; "did you raise your hand against him? What if he is hurt—wounded, and I not there to nurse his weakness? Maybe now he is tossing on the bed of fever!"

He made a movement as if to touch her, but she drew further back.

"Oh, he was a gentle youth; thou hadst no cause to hurt him!"

"I did not strike the young man wantonly to his hurt; he had his carbine cocked—"

Phenie interrupted.

"Cease, Elphin, cease. Thou hast put misery and trouble into the heart of thy sister, who would have given her life for thee!"

"Is this youth so much to you?" he asked, in a hollow voice.

With a shudder she laid the pistol on the stone wall.

"He is the love of my heart and the joy of my days, the man to whom my humble faith is given!"

"Then your lover is more to you than your own flesh and blood, Phemie Gilchrist?"

"Nay, nay," she cried with a start. "How could you know? Yet it is difficult for me to touch the hand that was raised against Frank Hawkins!"

He folded his arms on his bosom.

"Leave me, then, with the hoodie crow for company—ride back down the glen and let me wait the coming of the warriors."

"No!" exclaimed Phemie; "can you think me so disleal to my sworn word and to our natural affection—but, oh Elphin, I would it had not been thou to hurt him!"

A groan broke through the Covenanter's pale lips.

"Take your vengeance, Phemie; leave me here to my fate. The young man's companions are after me to avenge him."

"Hush; you must not speak such words of horrid import. Could a sister forsake a brother?"

With a burst of affection she caught and pressed his hand.

"Fly, Elphin, fly, and leave me to my sorrow! Where was it you saw him? To-morrow he was to have come back to Lanark, and now maybe he is lying sick and desolate on the heather! But hasten, Elphin, the time passeth."

He strode over to the horse and unloosened the bridle from the yew bough; his aspect was stern and his eye glared fiercely down the shadowed glen.

"Tell me," said Phemie, "how you left him, where he was hurt, and how he fell, if he was greatly wounded or no, what day it was, and what place——"

"Hush! I hear the jingle of the cavalry!"

She listened.

"No, Elphin, it was but the birds in the holly grove and the wind in the ruins. Hasten; but before you go, oh, answer me these questions of my dear!"

The Covenanter turned to face her; he cast the bridle from him; his face worked with emotion, and his bosom heaved with suppressed anguish.

"I would I was lapped in my last linen, lying in the dowie kirkyard, Phemie, sooner than have to say what I must to thee. But we cannot part on a lie."

"A lie?"

"Do not look at me so awesomely, my sister! He was one of the tyrant's servants——"

"Speak plain, Elphin, speak plain."

He paused for a moment, and the sweat broke out on his brow.

"Do not curse me. I killed Frank Hawkins."

A loud scream came from the ashy lips of Phemie Gilchrist. She stared at him with a frantic and glazing eye, which seemed to bespeak a reason overthrown.

"You killed him!" she shrieked.

"I smote him, and he fell among the slaughtered saints. I would not tell at first for fear of thy gentle heart; but now, Phemie, I cannot take my life from you under a deceit."

She darted from the graveyard on to the hillside.

"Off from me, murderer! Have I touched thee—clasped the hand that shed his blood—fed and succoured the slayer of my love!" She gave an unearthly laugh and clapped her hands together. "I have sewn the garments for my bridal, and I shall go kirkwards in white, but I shall not pass the church porch! And did you see his bonnie head low on the heather, and doth he lie

beneath the summer sod while I have been counting the days to his return?"

The Covenanter followed her, and tried to restrain her, but she shrieked again, and threw him off.

"Thou art revenged," he said mournfully. "I shall not ride to Clydesdale to-night; I see the troopers crossing the stream."

The unfortunate maiden turned her head and saw a little band of cavaliers armed with carbines and pistols, fluttering plumes and ruffles in the evening air, who, attracted by her screams while they searched the glen, had turned out of their way to the ruined churchyard.

Elphin Gilchrist folded his arms on his bosom.

"Do not let me die with thy curse on my head, Phemie!"

She gave another laugh of frenzy, and, springing down the sloping grass, pointed out with the gesture and mien of a maniac, the dark figure of her brother.

"There is the murderer, gentlemen!"

"It is the preacher who slew the cornet!" cried the foremost rider.

"God's will be done," said Elphin Gilchrist.

The trooper levelled his carbine, the shot echoed through the lonely glen, and the young Covenanter fell on his face beside the graveyard wall.

As he dropped Phemie Gilchrist rushed to his side, and glared down at his still heaving form with the serenity of delirium.

The officer rode up.

"Take away the lass," he said, "and fetch my pistol, if the villain have it still—that I lent to poor Graeme because his wheel-lock broke, if you recall, Mowbray."

Then, moved to pity by the motionless figure of the hooded maiden, whose little horse was in vain nosing her mantle, he himself galloped to her side.

"Blood for blood," she murmured. Then, hearing the jingle of his spur steel she looked up.

The cavalier gave an exclamation of horror, and she sank before his horse's feet like a sapling struck at the roots.

For she had lifted her eyes to the face of her lover, Frank Hawkins.

MARJORIE BOWEN.

occur stories of almost every kind of supernatural experience, from mental telepathy to manifestation, but there are some of them that stand out particularly from the rest.

THREE is always an uncanny atmosphere about the East, and a story in this book, entitled "The Curse," is most dramatic. It tells of an Englishwoman who invoked the wrath of a *Yogi*, or holy man, who demanded the Englishwoman's *Ayah* to procure him a hair from her mistress's head. The terrible tragedy that was averted by the faithful servant giving the *Yogi* a mat hair instead of the human one will enthrall everyone. Another amazing tale from the East concerns the experience of three Englishmen and two women who witnessed the spectacle of weights, amounting to two tons, lifted of their own accord to a height of nearly two feet from the floor by, apparently, mental suggestion.

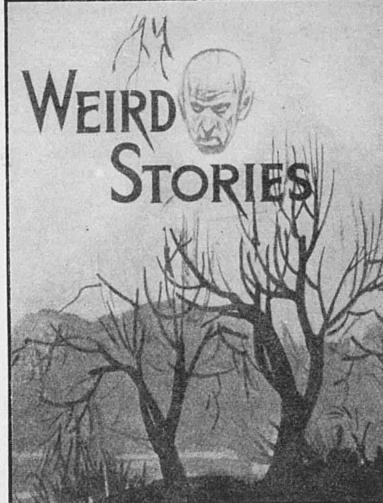
TWO readers interested in spiritualism will find two stories of photographic manifestation interesting. One about a certain rector, who, on taking photographs of an historic church, found on every negative the figures of priests and nuns kneeling or officiating at the altar. The other is of an engaged girl, who had her photograph taken at a studio. Finding that the photographers were very loath to let her see proofs, she sent a friend, who

finally persuaded them to reveal the proofs. The friend was horrified to see in the proofs the figure of the engaged girl's future husband standing behind his *fiancée* with an upraised dagger, a manifestation that was dreadfully fulfilled. Another story dealing with photographs, and a most poignant one, is that of a man who relates how on three occasions a photograph of someone dear to him has been destroyed prior to the subject's death. In this way he has received a warning of the death of his wife and his two sons, and he most tragically ends: "I have one photograph left, and I shall feel so happy when I lose that; it is a photograph of—myself!"

AND interesting example of television is the story told by a member of the Scott's South Pole Expedition in 1912, who had a vision of the Norwegians reaching the South Pole on the exact day that nearly a year later he learnt that they did actually arrive.

THERE are countless other intriguing stories and recollections in this book, and *Weird Stories* makes a most successful "thriller." Particularly so because the majority of the stories concern twentieth-century experiences, which seem all the more eerie in a world that is no longer ruled by a general superstition of, to quote the *Ingoldsby Legends*, "Witches and Warlocks, Ghosts, Goblins and Ghouls."

WILFRED GAVIN.



SUCCESSFUL stories of the supernatural usually fall into two classes—those that are written as fiction by a professional writer who is a real artist at his work, and those that are related as bald facts without any embroidery or strain of imagination. *Weird Stories* (Illustrated Newspapers, Ltd.: 2s. 6d. net) is a book that comes in the latter class of merit, since it is a collection of stories that have appeared in the *Tatler*, and which have been submitted by responsible people in good faith. In this book



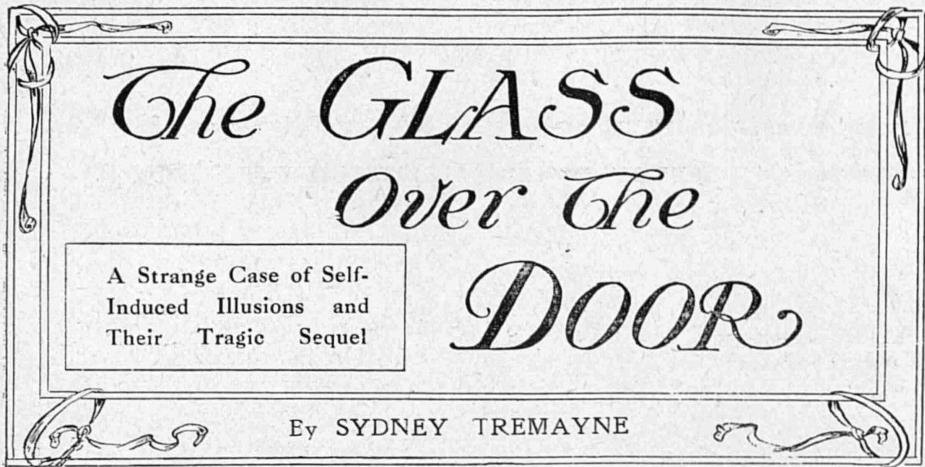
Vault Bystander Sampler Vol 3

Marjorie Bowen - Phemie Gilchrist, 11 January 1911

Stephen Saint - The New Sin, March 23 1910

Gerald Kirsh - Dr. Ox Will Die At Midnight, 22 September 1937

Ford Madox Hueffer - The Medium's End, 13 March 1912



Extracts from the Journal of
Christopher Fowell Farnham, M.D., F.R.S.

WIMPOLE STREET, MAY 8

I have to-day succeeded in making a highly interesting and satisfactory experiment, its object being to ascertain the exact extent to which lunacy is the outcome of consistent and concentrated misdirection of thought, and, inversely, how much the maladies of the mind may be alleviated by distraction.

I determined to learn in what degree the symptoms of lunacy could be produced in a healthy mind by this concentrated misdirection of thought. Being better assured of my own sanity than I could possibly be of another's, and also better able to judge exactly of my own sensations, I decided to make the experiment on myself.

Selecting the suspicion of being spied upon as the most common symptom of madness, and the most readily simulated, I set out for a walk, with the determination of seeing in everyone I met a spy. At first this required the greatest effort of the imagination, but as I turned into Langham Place I had a very real and objectionable sense of being followed. I slackened my pace, and the irritating steps behind me came closer, and finally my imagined enemy overtook and passed me. He was an ordinary-looking working-man in fustians, but I found myself watching him suspiciously, and even questioning if his get-up was not a disguise.

The feeling I was at such pains to produce rapidly grew upon me, and by the time I reached Regent's Park every bush seemed to harbour an enemy, and on returning to the streets from each window eyes spied upon my movements.

It was only with an effort that I shook off this feeling, and for some hours after my return home I found myself intermittently under the uncanny impression of being watched.

This has proved, more conclusively than I dared hope, the soundness of my theory, and working with this data I believe I shall be able to build up a system for the treatment of mental cases which will revolutionise science.

HOARFIELD LODGE, AUGUST 19

I have been working very hard of late, and last night I had an extraordinary and alarming experience, which convinces me that I was wise to move down here, where I can work quietly, away from the heat

and germ-laden atmosphere of London. I shall doubtless benefit by the peace and fresh air.

It was past three o'clock when I put up my books and went to bed, and even then my mind was in such an active condition that I found it impossible to compose myself to sleep.

For how long I had lain in a fever of thought I do not know, when, in the intense silence I distinctly heard the sound of a tap on glass. After some seconds

it was repeated louder, and this time I was certain that it came from the direction of the door. I knew that something was tapping on the pane of glass which is let into the top of my door. I remembered impatiently how that pane had always irritated me, giving me the impression of being overlooked, and I rebuked myself for not having had it removed.

I had a curious sensation of holding back, of clinging to some intangible source of safety, and I knew that as long as I could keep my eyes from that pane of glass I was safe, though how this could be, or from what, was beyond my understanding.

By an immense effort of will I kept my eyes closed. I was overcome by a terror which amounted almost to physical pain, and extended, seemingly, to my every limb.

As I lay thus the knowledge of what I should see if I lifted my eyes came to me, almost as a remembrance, and as I thought of it fear made damp my brow and palms, and with all the force at my command I increased the effort to refrain from opening my eyes.

I knew that against the glass was pressed a face—yellow, hideous, and misshapen. I knew that from the cavernous sockets glared red, malignant eyes. I knew that the lipless mouth was extended in a wicked, fang-revealing smile; and the horror of it seemed to be stifling the life out of me.

How long, how long would it remain, how long could I resist opening my eyes upon it! Oh, God! the agony of those moments.

Suddenly something gave way; my struggle was over. I looked upon the pane of glass, and as I had known it would be, there was the awful leering face, just as I had already pictured it, and a ghastly, claw-like hand beckoned to me. Even in that terrible instant my reasoning faculty did not desert me, and I sought an explanation of the fact that the face was clearly visible, although it was totally dark. Then all the pent-up dread within me burst from my lips in an involuntary shriek, and I remembered no more.

At eight o'clock this morning Mrs. Seely discovered me in an unconscious condition, and administered restoratives. As soon as I came to, my nightmare, for, of course, it was no more, returned to me with such vividness that even in the light of day I trembled violently, and involuntarily and apprehensively glanced at the innocent pane of glass over the door.

The unconsciousness following the imagined terror is, I consider, the worst feature of the case. I very much fear that I am suffering from brain-fag. I shall

endeavour to work during shorter hours, but my research into the cause and cure of madness is at a very critical and interesting stage, and I cannot afford to lose time.

SEPTEMBER 4. HOARFIELD

I have just given orders for the removal of the pane of glass above my door. As the result of another shocking nightmare my nerves are completely shattered this morning, and my hand shakes so that I can hardly write. I am without doubt run down from too much work. I shall henceforth devote some hours of each day to outdoor exercise. So much concentrated brainwork is having a deleterious effect upon my health. Ever since my nightmare and subsequent fainting fit I have been unable to rid myself of an augmented dislike of, and discomfort from, the presence of the glass above my door, and I think it possible that the removal of this cause of annoyance may prevent the recurrence of my disagreeable dream.

It is a curious fact that, although in the morning I know the phenomena to be but a dream creation, at the time of its appearance so appallingly real does it seem that I could swear to being awake.

Last night I must have fallen asleep at the writing-table. I thought that, suddenly, in the middle of my work, I became aware of the presence of something fear-giving and super-normal. Instinctively my eyes went to the glass, and there rested on the same vile, livid face that I had before beheld. I shrank back shuddering, but the shrivelled claw beckoned me, and helplessly I rose and went to the door. The face disappeared, and the landing was tenantless, but something beyond my control led me onward, still inwardly engaged in a cruel, vain struggle to ignore the call. Downstairs and across the hall I knew that I was following the thing with the haunting yellow face, although I could not see it. Even in the darkness I had no difficulty in unbolting the front door—over the lawn and down the laurel walk I was impelled, and all the time my agony of mind was such that I could not describe it.

I went, in spite of myself, and unhesitatingly, to the Grotto, and in the chamber built over the source of the stream, high up against the mosaic of the wall, I saw again the tormenting, grinning visage and the beckoning claw—they were, apparently, *bodiless*. For a moment I stood motionless, and in fear; then I turned and fled.

I awoke this morning in my own room, unrefreshed, and acutely nervous. Whether I am actually a victim to somnambulism, or only *dreamt* my nocturnal walk, I cannot say. There are no traces of the former, the door being bolted and barred as Canning left it last evening; but this, of course, proves nothing.

I have to-day visited the Grotto, locked the little door into the small inner chamber, and also the iron gates admitting to the main circular hall; I have put the keys in the escritoire downstairs.

SEPTEMBER 23. HOARFIELD

This dream is becoming an obsession and undermining my strength. I now regret that I did not carry out my intention of having the glass removed from my door; but such an act appeared too great a concession to my absurd imaginings; but last night

I was again subjected to this peculiarly unpleasant night-terror.

Once more I was impelled to the Grotto. The gates were locked, and here my experience again ended. But, if anything, the horror I suffered, though apparently causeless, was even greater than hitherto, and daylight has failed to dissipate the malevolent influence. I shall take a tonic. I have been too engrossed in my work to permit of rest this week.

The idea has come to me that the horrible face of my dream is the personification of madness, which, fearing destruction at *my* hands, would lead me from my purpose—would destroy me. Indeed, I have the feeling that should I enter the grotto I should not come out alive. Bah! What have I written? This nightmare has, indeed, preyed on my imagination. I am overwrought; but I will think no more of it. To work. . . .

This is the last entry.

From the Morning Paper of September 29

DEATH OF EMINENT SCIENTIST UNDER UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Our readers will recall the recent announcement in these columns of the mysterious disappearance of Dr. Powell Farnham from his country residence in Hampshire during the night of the 23rd. We regret to state that the discovery of his body has justified the worst fears of his friends.

It will be remembered that when Dr. Farnham's housekeeper, Mrs. Emily Seely, according to custom, went to call her master on the morning of the 24th, she found his room empty and his bed unslept in. Becoming alarmed she instituted a search throughout the house and grounds of Hoarfield Lodge, but no signs of the doctor could be found, on that or the three following days.

In the course of investigations Colonel J. P. Farnham came upon his brother's journal, in which the last entry was made on the day of his unaccountable disappearance, and which he hoped would throw some light on the mystery. This was, in fact, the case, for in it the unfortunate scientist described an unsuspected tendency of his to somnambulism, and stated that in his nightly wanderings he visited a certain part of the grounds known as the Grotto, where an eccentric former owner had built a beautiful circular chamber and inner room over the source of a spring. The coolness of the stone had made it an ideal summer-house in hot weather.

The place in which he kept the keys of the wrought-iron gates before the Grotto was also indicated in the Doctor's journal, but they were found to have disappeared.

Yesterday the Colonel went to the Grotto, but the gates were locked. They were forced, and in the small cell-like chamber beyond the hall was discovered the dead body of Doctor Farnham; he had the keys in his hand.

It was known that the Doctor's heart was not strong, and only last month Mrs. Seely states that she found him in the morning in a dead faint, which had evidently been of considerable duration, and it is surmised that he visited the Grotto in the course of his sleep-walking, was seized with faintness, and expired.

The Coroner's inquest will be held to-day.

SYDNEY TREMAYNE.



IN a forest of mixed growth somewhere on the eastern spurs of the Karpathians, a man stood one winter night watching and listening, as though he waited for some beast of the woods to come within the range of his vision, and, later, of his rifle. But the game for whose presence he kept so keen an outlook was none that figured in the sportsman's calendar as lawful and proper for the chase ; Ulrich von Gradwitz patrolled the dark forest in quest of a human enemy.

The forest lands of Gradwitz were of wide extent and well stocked with game ; the narrow strip of precipitous woodland that lay on its outskirt was not remarkable for the game it harboured or the shooting it afforded, but it was the most jealously guarded of all its owner's territorial possessions. A famous law suit, in the days of his grandfather, had wrested it from the illegal possession of a neighbouring family of petty landowners ; the dispossessed party had never acquiesced in the judgment of the Courts, and a long series of poaching affrays and similar scandals had embittered the relationships between the families for three generations. The neighbour feud had grown into a personal one since Ulrich had come to be head of his family ; if there was a man in the world whom he detested and wished ill to it was Georg Znaeym, the inheritor of the quarrel and the tireless game-snatcher and raider of the disputed border-forest. The feud might, perhaps, have died down or been compromised if the personal ill-will of the two men had not stood in the way ; as boys they had thirsted for one another's blood, as men each prayed that misfortune might fall on the other, and this wind-scoured winter night Ulrich had banded together his foresters to watch the dark forest, not in quest of four-footed quarry, but to keep a look-out for the prowling thieves whom he suspected of being afoot from across the land boundary. The roebuck, which usually kept in the sheltered hollows during a storm-wind, were running like driven things to-night, and there was movement and unrest among the creatures that were wont to sleep through the dark hours. Assuredly there was a disturbing element in the forest, and Ulrich could guess the quarter from whence it came.

He strayed away by himself from the watchers whom he had placed in ambush on the crest of the hill, and wandered far down the steep slopes amid the wild tangle of undergrowth, peering through the tree trunks and listening through the whistling and skirling of the wind and the restless beating of the branches for sight or sound of the marauders. If only on this wild night, in this dark, lone spot, he might come across Georg Znaeym, man to man, with none to witness—that was the wish that was uppermost in his thoughts. And as he stepped round the trunk of a huge beech he came face to face with the man he sought.

The two enemies stood glaring at one another for a

long silent moment. Each had a rifle in his hand, each had hate in his heart and murder uppermost in his mind. The chance had come to give full play to the passions of a lifetime. But a man who has been brought up under the code of a restraining civilisation cannot easily nerve himself to shoot down his neighbour in cold blood and without word spoken, except for an offence against his hearth and honour. And before the moment of hesitation had given way to action a deed of Nature's own violence overwhelmed them both. A fierce shriek of the storm had been answered by a splitting crash over their heads, and ere they could leap aside a mass of falling beech tree had thundered down on them. Ulrich von Gradwitz found himself stretched on the ground, one arm numb beneath him and the other held almost as helplessly in a tight tangle of forked branches, while both legs were pinned beneath the fallen mass. His heavy shooting-boots had saved his feet from being crushed to pieces, but if his fractures were not as serious as they might have been, at least it was evident that he could not move from his present position till someone came to release him. The descending twigs had slashed the skin of his face, and he had to wince away some drops of blood from his eyelashes before he could take in a general view of the disaster. At his side, so near that under ordinary circumstances he could almost have touched him, lay Georg Znaeym, alive and struggling, but obviously as helplessly pinioned down as himself. All round them lay a thick-strewn wreckage of splintered branches and broken twigs.

Relief at being alive and exasperation at his captive plight brought a strange medley of pious thank-offerings and sharp curses to Ulrich's lips. Georg, who was nearly blinded with the blood which trickled across his eyes, stopped his struggling for a moment to listen, and then gave a short, snarling laugh.

"So you're not killed, as you ought to be, but you're caught, anyway," he cried ; "caught fast. Ho, what a jest, Ulrich von Gradwitz snared in his stolen forest. There's real justice for you ! "

And he laughed again, mockingly and savagely.

"I'm caught in my own forest-land," retorted Ulrich. "When my men come to release us you will wish, perhaps, that you were in a better plight than caught poaching on a neighbour's land, shame on you."

Georg was silent for a moment ; then he answered quietly :

"Are you sure that your men will find much to release ? I have men, too, in the forest to-night, close behind me, and they will be here first and do the releasing. When they drag me out from under these damned branches it won't need much clumsiness on their part to roll this mass of trunk right over on the top of you. Your men will find you dead under a fallen beech tree. For form's sake I shall send my condolences to your family."

"It is a useful hint," said Ulrich fiercely. "My men had orders to follow in ten minutes time, seven of which must have gone by already, and when they get me out—I will remember the hint. Only as you will have met your death poaching on my lands I don't think I can decently send any message of condolence to your family."

"Good," snarled Georg, "good. We fight this quarrel out to the death, you and I and our foresters, with no cursed interlopers to come between us. Death and damnation to you, Ulrich von Gradwitz."

"The same to you, Georg Znaeym, forest-thief, game-snatcher."

Both men spoke with the bitterness of possible defeat before them, for each knew that it might be long before his men would seek him out or find him; it was a bare matter of chance which party would arrive first on the scene.

Both had now given up the useless struggle to free themselves from the mass of wood that held them down; Ulrich limited his endeavours to an effort to bring his one partially free arm near enough to his outer coat-pocket to draw out his wine-flask. Even when he had accomplished that operation it was long before he could manage the unscrewing of the stopper or get any of the liquid down his throat. But what a Heaven-sent draught it seemed! It was an open winter, and little snow had fallen as yet, hence the captives suffered less from the cold than might have been the case at that season of the year; nevertheless, the wine was warming and reviving to the wounded man, and he looked across with something like a throb of pity to where his enemy lay, just keeping the groans of pain and weariness from crossing his lips.

"Could you reach this flask if I threw it over to you?" asked Ulrich suddenly; "there is good wine in it, and one may as well be as comfortable as one can. Let us drink, even if to-night one of us dies."

"No, I can scarcely see anything; there is so much blood caked round my eyes," said Georg, "and in any case I don't drink wine with an enemy."

Ulrich was silent for a few minutes, and lay listening to the weary screeching of the wind. An idea was slowly forming and growing in his brain, an idea that gained strength every time that he looked across at the man who was fighting so grimly against pain and exhaustion. In the pain and languor that Ulrich himself was feeling the old fierce hatred seemed to be dying down.

"Neighbour," he said presently, "do as you please if your men come first. It was a fair compact. But as for me, I've changed my mind. If my men are the first to come you shall be the first to be helped, as though you were my guest. We have quarrelled like devils all our lives over this stupid strip of forest, where the trees can't even stand upright in a breath of wind. Lying here to-night thinking I've come to think we've been rather fools; there are better things in life than getting the better of a boundary dispute. Neighbour, if you will help me to bury the old quarrel I—I will ask you to be my friend."

Georg Znaeym was silent for so long that Ulrich thought, perhaps, he had fainted with the pain of his injuries. Then he spoke slowly and in jerks.

"How the whole region would stare and gabble if we rode into the market-square together. No one living can remember seeing a Znaeym and a von

Gradwitz talking to one another in friendship. And what peace there would be among the forester folk if we ended our feud to-night. And if we choose to make peace among our people there is none other to interfere, no interlopers from outside. . . . You would come and keep the Sylvester night beneath my roof, and I would come and feast on some high day at your castle. . . . I would never fire a shot on your land, save when you invited me as a guest; and you should come and shoot with me down in the marshes where the wildfowl are. In all the countryside there are none that could hinder if we willed to make peace. I never thought to have wanted to do other than hate you all my life, but I think I have changed my mind about things too, this last half-hour. And you offered me your wine-flask. . . . Ulrich von Gradwitz, I will be your friend."

For a space both men were silent, turning over in their minds the wonderful changes that this dramatic reconciliation would bring about. In the cold, gloomy forest, with the wind tearing in fitful gusts through the naked branches and whistling round the tree-trunks, they lay and waited for the help that would now bring release and succour to both parties. And each prayed a private prayer that his men might be the first to arrive, so that he might be the first to show honourable attention to the enemy that had become a friend.

Presently, as the wind dropped for a moment, Ulrich broke silence.

"Let's shout for help," he said; "in this lull our voices may carry a little way."

"They won't carry far through the trees and undergrowth," said Georg, "but we can try. Together, then."

The two raised their voices in a prolonged hunting call.

"Together again," said Ulrich a few minutes later, after listening in vain for an answering halloo.

"I heard something that time, I think," said Ulrich.

"I heard nothing but the pestilential wind," said Georg hoarsely.

There was silence again for some minutes, and then Ulrich gave a joyful cry.

"I can see figures coming through the wood. They are following in the way I came down the hillside."

Both men raised their voices in as loud a shout as they could muster.

"They hear us! They've stopped. Now they see us. They're running down the hill towards us," cried Ulrich.

"How many of them are there?" asked Georg.

"I can't see distinctly," said Ulrich; "nine or ten."

"Then they are yours," said Georg; "I had only seven out with me."

"They are making all the speed they can, brave lads," said Ulrich gladly.

"Are they your men?" asked Georg. "Are they your men?" he repeated impatiently as Ulrich did not answer.

"No," said Ulrich with a laugh, the idiotic chattering laugh of a man unstrung with hideous fear.

"Who are they?" asked Georg quickly, straining his eyes to see what the other would gladly not have seen.

"Wolves."

"SAKI"



The Pond

By "SAKI"

MONA had always regarded herself as cast for the tragic rôle; her name, her large dark eyes, and the style of hair-dressing that best suited her, all contributed to support that outlook on life. She wore habitually the air of one who has seen trouble, or, at any rate, expects to do so very shortly; and she was accustomed to speak of the Angel of Death almost as other people would speak of their chauffeur waiting round the corner to fetch them at the appointed moment. Fortune-tellers, noting this tendency in her disposition, invariably hinted at something in her fate which they did not care to speak about too explicitly. "You will marry the man of your choice, but afterwards you will pass through strange fires," a Bond Street two-guinea palm-oilist had told her. "Thank you," said Mona, "for your plain-speaking. But I have known it always."

In marrying John Waddacombe, Mona had mated herself with a man who shared none of her intimacy with the shadowy tragedies of what she called the half-seen world. He had the substantial tragedies of his own world to bother about, without straining his mental eyesight for the elusive and dubious distractions belonging to a sphere that lay entirely beyond his range of vision; or, for the matter of that, his range of interests. Potato blight, swine fever, the Government's land legislation, and other pests of the farm absorbed his

attention as well as his energies, and even if he had admitted the possibility of such a disease as soul-sickness, of which Mona recognised eleven distinct varieties, most of them incurable, he would probably have prescribed a fortnight at the seaside as the most hopeful and natural remedy. There was no disguising the fact, John Waddacombe was of the loam, loamy. If he had cared to go into politics he would have been known inevitably as honest John Waddacombe, and after that there is nothing more to be said.

Two days, or thereabouts, after her marriage, Mona had made the tragic discovery that she was yoked to a life-partner with whom she had little in common, and from whom she could expect nothing in the way of sympathetic understanding. Anyone else, knowing both her and John and their respective temperaments, could have advanced her that information the moment that the engagement was announced. John was fond of her in his own way, and she, in her quite different way, was more than a little fond of him; but they trafficked in ideas that had scarcely a common language.

Mona set out on her married life with the expectation of being misunderstood, and after a while John arrived at the rather obvious conclusion that he didn't understand her—and was content to "leave it at that." His wife was at first irritated and then disheartened by his attitude of stolid unconcern. "Least said, soonest mended," was his comfortable doctrine, which failed woefully when applied to Mona's share of the reticence. She was unhappy and perturbed about their lack of soul-fellowship; why couldn't he be decently distressed about it also? From being at first theatrically miserable she became more seriously affected. The morbid strain in her character found at last something tangible to feed on, and brought a good appetite to the feeding. While John was busy and moderately happy with his farm troubles, Mona was dull, unoccupied, and immoderately unhappy with her own trouble.

It was at this time, in the course of one of her moody, listless rambles, that she came across the pond. In the high chalky soil of the neighbourhood, standing water was a rarity; with the exception of the artificially made duck-pond at the farm and one or two cattle pools, Mona knew of no other for miles round. It stood in a clay "pocket" in the heart of a neglected beech plantation on the steep side of a hill, a dark, evil-looking patch of water, fenced round and overspread with gloomy yews and monstrous decaying beeches. It was not a cheerful spot, and such picturesqueness as it possessed was all on the side of melancholy; the only human suggestion that could arise in connection with the pool was the idea of a dead body floating on its surface. Mona took to the place with an instantaneous sense of fascination; it suited her temperament, and it mightily suited her mood. Nearly all her walks led her to the beechwood, and the Mecca of the wood was always the still dark pond, with its suggestion of illimitable depths, its silence, its air of an almost malignant despondency. If one could indulge in such a flight of fancy as to imagine a hill rejoicing, or a valley smiling, one could certainly picture the pond wearing a sullen, evil scowl.

Mona wove all sorts of histories about the pool, and in most of them there was some unhappy, fate-buffed

soul who hung wearily over its beckoning depths and finally floated in sombre spectacular repose among the weeds on its surface, and each time that she reshaped the story she identified the victim more and more with herself. She would stand or sit on the steeply inclined bank that overhung the pond on every side, peering down at the water and reflecting on the consequences that would follow a slip of her foot or an incautious venturing over-near the edge. How long would she struggle in those unfathomed weed-grown depths before she lay as picturesquely still as the drowned heroine of her tale-weavings, and how long would she float there in peace, with the daylight and moonlight reaching down to her through the over-arching catafalque of yew and beech, before searchers discovered her resting-place, and haled her body away to the sordid necessities of inquest and burial? The idea of ending her despondencies and soul troubles in that dark, repose-inviting pool took firmer and clearer shape; there seemed a spirit lurking in its depths and smiling on its surface that beckoned her to lean further and yet further over its edge, to stand more and more rashly on the steep slope that overhung it. She took a subtle pleasure in marking how the fascination grew on her with each visit; how the dread of the catastrophe that she was courting grew less and less. Every time that she reluctantly tore herself away from the spot there seemed a half-teasing, half-reproachful murmur in the air around her, "Why not to-day?"

And then, at a timely moment, John Waddacombe, hearty as an ox, and seemingly proof against weather exposure, fell suddenly and critically ill with a lung attack that nearly triumphed over doctors and nurses and his own powers of stubborn resistance. Mona did her fair share of the nursing while the case was critical, fighting with greater zeal against the death that threatened her husband than she had shown in combatting the suggestion of self-destruction that had gained so insidious a hold on her. And when the convalescent stage had been reached she found John, weak and rather fretful as he was after his long experience of the sick-room, far more lovable and sympathetic than he had been in the days of his vigour. The barriers of reserve and mutual impatience had been broken down, and husband and wife found that they had more in common than they had once thought possible. Mona forgot the pond, or thought of it only with a shudder; a healthy contempt for her morbid weakness and silliness had begun to assert itself. John was not the only one of them who was going through a period of convalescence.

The self-pity and the coquetry with self-destruction had passed away under the stress of new sympathies and interests; the morbid undercurrent was part of Mona's nature, and was not to be cast out at a moment's notice. It was the prompting of this undercurrent that led her, one day in the autumn, to pay a visit to the spot where she had toyed so weakly with stupid, evil ideas and temptations. It would be, she felt, a curious sensation to renew acquaintance with the place now that its fascination and potential tragedy had been destroyed. In outward setting it was more desolate and gloom-shrouded than ever; the trees had lost their early autumnal magnificence, and rain had soaked the fallen beech leaves into a paste of dark slush under foot. Amid the nakedness of their neighbours, the yews stood out thick, and black, and

forbidding, and the sickly growth of fungoid things showed itself prominently amid the rotting vegetation. Mona peered down at the dark, ugly pool, and shuddered to think that she could ever have contemplated an end so horrible as choking and gasping to death in those foul, stagnant depths, with their floating surface of slime and creeping water insects and rank weed-growth. And then the thing that she recoiled from in disgust seemed to rise up towards her as though to drag her down in a long-deferred embrace. Her feet had slipped on the slithery surface of sodden leaves and greasy clay, and she was sliding helplessly down the steep bank to where it dropped sheer into the pool. She clutched and clawed frantically at yielding roots and wet, slippery earth, and felt the weight of her body pull her downward with an increasing momentum. The hideous pool, whose fascination she had courted and slighted, was gaping in readiness for her; even if she had been a swimmer there would have been little chance for her in those weed-tangled depths, and John would find her there, as once she had almost wished—John who had loved her and learned to love her better than ever; John whom she loved with all her heart. She raised her voice to call his name again and again, but she knew that he was a mile or two away, busy with the farm life that once more claimed his devoted attention. She felt the bank slide away from her in a dark, ugly smear, and heard the small stones and twigs that she had dislodged fall with soft splashes into the water at her feet; above her, far above her it seemed, the yews spread their sombre branches like the roof-span of a crypt.

"Heavens alive, Mona, where did you get all that mud?" asked John in some pardonable astonishment. "Have you been playing catch-as-catch-can with the pigs? You're splashed up to the eyes in it."

"I slipped into a pond," said Mona.

"What, into the horse-pond?" asked John.

"No, a pond out in one of the woods," she explained.

"I didn't know there was such a thing for miles round," said John.

"Well, perhaps it would be an exaggeration to call it a pond," said Mona, with a faint trace of resentment in her voice; "it's only about an inch and a half deep."

SAKI

TO AUTHORS.

THE BYSTANDER is willing to consider stories belonging to either of the two following classes:

(a) Stories of from 2,500 to 3,500 words in length of dramatic interest. Novelty of idea specially welcomed. A brief résumé of the plot must accompany each story.

(b) Comedy stories of about 1,000 to 1,250 words. A minimum payment of three guineas will be made for such of these as are selected for publication.

Each manuscript must be accompanied by a stamped and addressed envelope.



A MAN called Edward White was talking to a man called Charles Fowler at the Embankment Club. White was a man of thirty-eight and Fowler was thirty-nine, having just returned to London after seven years in Burmah.

"So you're still in the Bank?" Fowler asked.

"I am one of the Directors," White answered; "though that is no particular credit to me, as most of my family are directors, and I just stepped in. It isn't, I mean, like making a career. It was just waiting for me."

"Then South . . ." the other began.

"Oh, you remember South?" White asked.

"You'd nothing else but South on your mind just when I went away," Fowler said. "I thought you were going clean mad—both you and Milly."

The banker looked gravely at the point of his evening slippers.

"I think we were both going mad," he said; "but it wasn't we who did in the end, it was South."

"Oh, South," Charles Fowler said; "I thought there was more in him than that. I thought he was a tremendous swindler—what's the word?—charlatan? But I certainly thought he had some sort of powers."

"He had," the banker declared grimly. "I don't want to talk about it, but I may as well. If I don't you'll hear some silly version from some other chap. It was like this:

"Just about after you left, Milly and I really did go practically off our heads. It wasn't only that we were prepared to stake all we had on that wretched medium's wretched tricks. I use the word 'wretched' quite carefully, because that was what they were. The whole thing was a wretched business. It wasn't, as I've said, that Milly and I were prepared to stake our whole fortunes, but we were trying—we were succeeding—in roping in the whole fortunes of a lot of other people—unfortunate old maids and servants and people."

"You can't understand that sort of madness. I can't understand it myself, though I've been through it. Why, I mean, should the fact that a tambourine jangles in the air in a dark room or a phosphorescent hand touches you on the face—why in the world should that seem the most important thing in the whole world? There's no knowing. It's just a madness. It's like seeing an enormously bright ray of light and being convinced that it's a diamond sparkling. And then suddenly, lo! and behold it's just a bit of broken bottle glass."

"Anyhow, there was this man South—a weird-looking creature, with nasty, shifty eyes. You remember him. You used to think he had powers, you say? Well, he had powers."

"But the point is that the powers he had weren't,

if you understand me, the powers we thought he had. They weren't even the powers *he* thought he had.

"Anyhow, we were getting together quite a large sum of money for him—quite a large sum. There was mine, and Milly's, and old, odd Williamson's, and twenty or thirty other people's. Why, there might have been forty to fifty thousand pounds in it for him. And after this—his collapse—we discovered that he had forged another old woman's name for just about forty thousand, and lost the money on the Stock Exchange. So that our money would just have gone to make up that sum. You understand, he was an arrant swindler. He thought he was an arrant swindler. After his collapse I found in his pocket all the usual paraphernalia of these fellows—the rubber glove with the tube, the fishing-lines with the small hooks, the bird-lime, the patent reflecting spectacles—but just the very cheapest sort of swindler he was. It was nothing short of amazing that he hadn't been found out, for every one of his tricks had been exposed thirty or forty times, even at that date."

"And then came his extraordinary triumph—what you might call his hour of victory and death. What I am going to tell you is absolute truth—perfect and exact truth."

"It was the day before our cheque was to have been handed over to South. And South was going to give us all a manifestation in the afternoon. He preferred the night himself, as a rule, because it was easier to get darkness. But there was an old General Sir Neville Beville, who had to catch a 6.20 train to his place near Southampton, and we wanted to get some money out of him, so the séance was to take place at half-past four, at Lady Arundale Maxwell's. You remember her? She is dead now."

"I daresay you remember her room, a big, ordinary drawing-room, with a terrific lot of Indian stuff about it, in Queen Anne's Mansions. Not in the least bogeyfied as far as the house went; but, of course, there was that disagreeable skeleton of the old West Indian *Obi* worker in front of the fireplace. And there were other unpleasant things in the room, though I've rather forgotten what they were. I daresay South rather liked to have them about. They increased the feeling of mystery."

"Well, the meeting began about four. There might have been twenty of us. General Sir Neville Beville himself tied South into an ordinary bentwood American chair. South wasn't looking at all well that day. Extraordinarily pale he was, and with his eyes unusually big."

"The General tied and tied, and then South winced, and said: 'Hi! I can't stand that.' The old General said: 'Ah! I thought you wouldn't be able to. That was a knot I used for tying up some of those Yogi fellows that did the murders in the Deccan.'

"But, confound it," South exclaimed, "I'm not a murderer. There's no need to tie the ropes till they eat into the flesh right through my skin. Damn it, you untie them!"

"The General grumbled a good deal; then he undid the knot, and South began to shake his hands and slap them together. They were perfectly blue. He began to explain to the General that he could not be expected to make any manifestations when he was in acute pain; he wouldn't be able to keep his mind on the subject. And then he asked whether the General hadn't brought the pair of police handcuffs that he had suggested using. The General went and got the handcuffs. They were put on South's wrists behind the chair. Then the General took a piece of rope and tied it, from the cuffs, under the seat of the chair, to the two front legs and round and round South's legs and arms and body in all sorts of ways.

"South said he didn't mind that, but he still complained that his hands hurt him, and he really appeared to be extraordinarily irritable.

"It came out most when the General began to press him to make a demonstration in open daylight. You understand the General was an absolute novice at the sort of thing. He had never been to a *séance* of any kind before, and he was one of those chaps who say that they have an absolutely open mind. Usually South refused to answer many questions of that sort. He used to say he needed the darkness in order to be able to concentrate his mind. If he looked at any other objects they took his thoughts away. And usually that was taken to be sufficient. But the General went on pressing him and pressing him.

"'Can't you give an exhibition in the daylight?' he kept on saying. 'Can't you? Can't you?'

"And then South exclaimed, with exasperation—almost in a sort of scream:

"'By God, I can!'

"He must have been in a really extraordinary state of irritation; indeed, he looked as if he might be going mad. Almost positively epileptic. He sat, leaning forward on the ropes that tied him to the chair, and glared furiously at the General.

"'Well, then, do it!' the General said.

"Then fell a singular silence on us all. You see, we all believed in South. We all believed that he could make manifestations in the daylight, and we began to think he was going to do it then. It was decidedly the most unpleasant thing I've ever been in. The room, as I've pointed out, was quite commonplace. We could hear the rumble of the underground if we listened carefully, and a chap a long way down below crying daffodils, and, occasionally, a muffin-bell, as one of the windows was open.

"I forgot to tell you that what we had really come there for was to get a manifestation of the spirit of Anne Boleyn. She was an ancestress of General Neville Beville, and he was always talking about her. South kept staring at the General, and the General kept quite quiet. He explained afterwards that he didn't want to interfere with the chap, who he supposed was praying or something.

"I daresay South was a good deal upset, if only because he had to find the forty thousand next day, or it would mean seven years for him. I've no doubt, swindler that he was, he was praying for a miracle as hard as he could go. After all, his whole life was in the

balance, and I daresay his whole life was as important to him as anyone else's is to anyone else. At any rate, no doubt he was willing it as hard as he could.

"One of the bones of the old skeleton in front of the fireplace—it was decorated with bits of brass wire and scarlet flannel—creaked in the oddest possible manner. There was nothing very mysterious about that. South used to insist on its being stood in front of the fire whenever he was going to manifest, though it usually stood in a corner of the room. When it got near the heat, of course, the wood it was hung on to used to give a little, and so the bones moved. I've seen them move a dozen times.

"But South's condition was so strained that he really gave a high squeak.

"Then the tambourine at South's elbow moved. It jumped up and down perfectly plainly and visibly before all our eyes. It jingled and thumped, and South's jaw just hung open, and he just gazed at it. It began to hop about the table from edge to edge. Then it fell over on to the floor, and jingled away towards the skeleton.

"South said in a husky voice, 'Who's doing that?'

"His face was towards the window, and all our backs were to it. Then he screamed—the most agonised and beastly scream that I've ever heard outside of a lunatic asylum. Our eyes all followed his—a hand was coming in at the open window. You remember it was Anne Boleyn that we'd come there to meet. Well, this was Anne Boleyn's hand. There was a distinct rudimentary, extra little finger. Anne Boleyn had six fingers on her right hand. That was why she was always drawn with her hands folded. She was very much ashamed of the defect.

"And the hand just came in at the window. It was dark against the light at first, then it looked white enough. It passed close to old Lady Arundale Maxwell's face, and she exclaimed:

"'How cold! How extraordinarily cold!'

"We weren't any of us very particularly moved—not extra moved. We'd all of us been to a good many *séances*, and had felt cold hands passing near our faces. But, of course, it was a sufficiently exciting thing to have it happen in broad daylight.

"But South's mouth was hanging open; his eyes were starting out of his head, and there was perspiration all over his forehead. It was really most disagreeable to look at him.

"The hand stopped just beside General Neville Beville, at about a level with his chest. It was pointing towards South, with the first finger stretched out as if the person behind it were addressing him. He shrank back right against the back of his chair, huddling into it. The General slowly, and with a timidity that was singular in him, raised his own hand and just touched the other with his little finger. He drew his hand back sharply, as if he had had an electric shock. The hand began very slowly to move towards South. Then the medium screamed; he screamed very highly, and then exclaimed:

"'Cut me loose! For God's sake cut me loose. I shall go mad if it touches me.'

"It shows the state of agitation he must have been in that he made no attempt whatever to wriggle himself out of the handcuffs. In ordinary circumstances he could have done that as easily as you or I could take our waistcoats off. He went on imploring the General

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(Continued from page 552)

personally to let him loose. He abjured him, by his braveness as a soldier, to cut the ropes. I daresay it only took a moment or so, but this thing seemed to last for hours.

"The General certainly started towards the medium ; he put his hand into his pocket to take out a penknife. Then the hand moved right across the General's chest as if to bar his progress. He lifted up his left arm to push the hand away. And then we didn't see any more of the General. I don't mean to say that he disappeared in a flash, but it was as if we just forgot him. You understand, he wasn't there.

"He was found that afternoon wandering about Putney without a hat. He didn't remember how he got there ; he didn't even remember who he was. It was a case of complete failure of the memory. The only thing that he could remember at the moment was Anne Boleyn's hand ; and he didn't want to talk about that for fear of being laughed at. He never has talked about it except just once to me. The police took him home all right, of course, because he had his card-case in his pocket, and he was all right again in a month or so.

"As for the hand, it just got nearer and nearer to the medium, and he continued screaming until it touched him. Then he became dead silent, and, after the contact, he exclaimed : 'Cold ! cold !'

"That's all he's ever done from that day to this. He walks about the grounds of a private lunatic

asylum in Chiswick, shivering pitifully, and exclaiming : 'Cold ! cold !'

"Lady Arundale Maxwell pays for him. She devoutly imagines that when he is cured he will be able to explain the secrets of the universe ; but he will never be cured."

"And what do you make of it all ?" Charles Fowler asked.

"I don't make anything at all," Edward White answered. "Perhaps it was only the Grace of God. I mean that his collapse certainly saved quite a number of poor people from ruin, and possibly it saved me from becoming the accomplice—the quite unwilling accomplice, of course—of an atrocious charlatan. On the other hand, there's the other possible view—the view that Spiritualists are trying to make fashionable to-day—that mediums who are perfectly genuine sometimes have their days of failure, and reinforce themselves with bits of fishing-line and inflatable rubber gloves.

"But for myself I'm perfectly convinced that that poor beast was a swindler just at the end of his tether, and that, in his agony, his will, which he didn't really believe in, suddenly worked. He didn't in the least believe in ghosts ; he had to pretend that he did. And then suddenly the ghost came. That was why he was so horribly afraid. I think some of these chaps wouldn't go on playing these tricks if they knew what it might let them in for." FORD MADOX HUEFFER



AMONG THE FAMOUS PINES OF LEBANON

An avenue at Beyrouth, Syria, a seaport which has recently been the scene of operations by the Italian fleet

BYSTANDER SHORT STORY

The Haunted Ghosts.

A CHRISTMAS-EVE TRAGEDY



BY HORACE HORSNELL

Illustrated by Tony Sarg

DOES the idea appeal to you?" the house-agent said at last. "Do you think you could do it?"

The young actor smiled.

"Yes," he said, "I think I could do it all right. It would be rather a lark."

"Well, so long as you keep the amusing side to yourself, I see no reason why it shouldn't be entertaining. But you understand, of course, that the funny side is not the one that I wish to have accentuated."

"No—of course it isn't."

"You see," continued the house-agent in a more confidential tone, "the risks in an affair of this kind want watching. It isn't the sort of thing that's done. Might turn out very awkwardly. If it turns out all right, you shan't suffer. See? In fact, I'll go so far as to say that I'll double the fee I'm offering you should you carry the thing through successfully. My client is quite the best audience you could have. Straightforward, simple, honest, with just the right touch of sentiment. He'll be only too anxious that you should be a success."

"But you don't mean to tell me that he *knows*?"

The house-agent frowned, and made a fussy, impatient gesture.

"My dear fellow," he said, "don't make that mistake. I must have expressed myself very badly. When I say that my client will be anxious that you should be a success, I mean that *I* am anxious that your impersonation should convince him. There really is a ghost at Onslow Place; there has been for centuries. But for some reason or other it has failed, for the past few years, to appear. Change of ownership, no doubt. Well, my client wants a house, but he wants a ghost more. We've tried him with every haunted mansion on the market. But we've been disappointed every time. So you see that Onslow Place has got to produce its ghost, come what may. It's suitable in every other respect, and my client is getting an excellent bargain."

The house-agent turned to the papers on his desk and picked out a type-written document.

"Here you are," he said, "this is all you have to do," and began to read it.

"The apparition is that of a sallow-faced, thin, youngish man in black doublet and hose, with a sword, a cloak, and a lantern. He walks slowly along the terrace of the west wing. At the end of the terrace

the spectre draws his sword, waves it before him making the sign of the Cross, and disappears into the shrubbery with the sword held foremost in front of him."

"That oughtn't to be difficult, do you think?" he asked.

"No," said the actor; and added, "I've never played a ghost before, but I'm quite keen to try."

"Good!" said the house-agent. "I shall, of course, leave the question of costume and make-up entirely to you. That's your province. Now, tell me, can you get your things together and be ready for rehearsal, say, in a week's time—at Onslow Place?"

"Yes; I can promise that. And when is the first performance?"

"There is only one—at midnight on Christmas Eve. We'll consider it settled, then; and if you will call here at six o'clock next Thursday, we'll feed somewhere, and then go down to the house together and try the thing over."

On the following Thursday, at six o'clock precisely, the young actor presented himself and his bag of properties at the offices of Stapleton, the house-agent. After dinner they took the train to Mellinge, the station for Onslow Place, and walked from there to the house—a distance of about three miles.

It was a damp, dark night, and the journey across the park was rendered more tedious than it need have been by reason of the house-agent's extraordinary precautions against discovery. Had he been a detective, or a scout in time of war, he could not have been at more pains to mask his presence, his movements, and his identity. They floundered through a bog; they blundered through tangled undergrowth; they scratched and muddied themselves; and at every step the actor's bag seemed to become heavier, his spirits less cheerful. After about an hour and a half of this sort of thing, the chimneys of the house showed above a ridge of tree-tops. Then they halted and began to take their bearings.

The west wing was closely set about with laurel bushes and small trees. It was a gloomy, creeper-covered, out-standing portion, with a balustraded stone terrace leading to a large, formal garden. There were fountains and statues and grassy alleys, and all about were fantastic trees, cut to represent birds and ships and people. And over it all brooded deep silence, broken only by the occasional far-away cry of a bird or a little rustle in the bushes close at hand. The actor could not have had a more fitting scene.

"I think," said the house-agent, as they halted in the shrubbery at the end of the terrace, "I think you had better change here. We mustn't on any account arouse the suspicions of the housekeeper."

That's why I made it so late. She's in bed. And I've ascertained that there are no dogs."

"But look here," said the young man. "I've been thinking it over. Suppose someone does collar me on the night? How do I stand then?"

"You don't stand," said the house-agent, with heavy humour; "you run for all you're worth. But I've provided against that as well as I could. You didn't read the directions I gave you very carefully. They state particularly that the ghost cannot be seen by anyone outside the house. It must be watched through the closed windows of the library. That was my idea. So that's all right."

"I hope to goodness it will be," the actor said. "But do you expect me to change *here*?"

"I'm afraid you must," said the other. "There's no alternative. Don't quarrel with the conditions. They aren't of my making. You must see for yourself that a dressing-room here is out of the question."

"Yes," said the actor, reluctantly, "I suppose it is. But have you a light, anyway?"

"A light? What are you thinking about? Whatever we do we mustn't have a light. You never know who is about. You'll have to dress in the dark on the night, you know; that's why I thought we had better rehearse the thing on the spot. This is the only rehearsal we can manage. So look alive!"

The actor remained for a few moments in silent thought. There were things that he could have said—and, indeed, almost did say—that would have scattered the complacency of the house-agent, and given the situation a robust and definite conclusion. But he prided himself upon being what he called a sportsman. So, with a sort of desperate, dashing enthusiasm, he ripped off his coat and waistcoat, and hung them on the boughs of a neighbouring bush. This was, without a doubt, the most extraordinary part he had ever played, and certainly the most inconvenient dressing-room he had ever known—and he had experienced the worst that provincial theatres can offer. So soon as he laid a garment down it seemed to vanish. He mislaid everything, and nearly broke his ankle while struggling into tights that twisted and baffled his exploring legs, as though some perverse demon was his "dresser." And the unhelpful, apathetic company of the house-agent seemed to make matters worse. However, at last—perspiring and angry—he was approximately dressed and awaiting the house-agent's instructions.

The rehearsal, from the histrionic point of view, was a great success. The moon showed for awhile through the murk of cloud and mist, the wind sighed drearily in the bare branches of the trees as the tall, slim figure of the actor stalked, with face buried in his cloak, past the four, gaunt, shuttered windows of the library. He made the sign of the Cross with his sword when he reached the end of the terrace, and disappeared with melancholy magnificence into the shadow. Then he rejoined the gratified house-agent in the shrubbery.

"Excellent! Excellent!" said his enthusiastic employer. "If you do it like that on the night, the situation is more than saved, and I may screw an extra twenty pounds a year out of the prospective tenant! If I do, you shall share it. By the way, you have little to fear from interruption. My client is an eccentric man, and lives almost entirely by himself.

I do not anticipate any sort of gathering on the night. Most probably there will be no one but him and me to witness your performance—and we shall be inside the room."

"That's comforting," said the actor. "But next time I shall come ready dressed. No more of this blind-man's buff! A second experience like this would ruin my nerve and fluff the whole business."

He explored the unsympathetic darkness for his ordinary clothes; but, owing to the fact that the house-agent had shifted his position during the rehearsal, it was some time before he found them. He put his trousers on over his tights; while the house-agent, enthusiastic, but incompetent, sought unsuccessfully to assist him.

They had arranged to spend the night at the local inn.

"We'll look over the place in the morning by daylight," said the house-agent, "and then you can take your bearings properly."

"Yes—and find my confounded studs!" said the actor, effecting a clumsy compromise between collar and tie without the assistance of those necessary articles, which he had lost.

At last he and his employer retraced their way across the park, and reached the inn, where supper awaited them.

The day before Christmas dawned in fog and wet. It was the worst day of the year; and the actor lay late in bed that morning, after reading the final instructions he had received by letter from the house-agent. The journey to Onslow Place was this time to be a solitary one. The house-agent was pre-occupied with his client. But, as luck would have it, they all met on the platform that evening at Charing Cross. It seemed that the house-agent winked at him reassuringly as he passed; but otherwise he gave no sign of recognition. His companion—the prospective tenant of the house, a fat, clean-shaved, tallow-faced man, in a heavy overcoat and a brown bowler hat—seemed depressed by the house-agent's conversation. They entered a first-class compartment, while the young actor sought an empty third smoker, deposited his bag in the corner of the carriage, and paced the platform until the train started. His mind was pre-occupied by ways and means; his legs rather cramped and hot by reason of the black tights he was wearing under his trousers. He read, by fits and starts, the typed instructions referring to the ghost, and mentally rehearsed every step, gesture, attitude, and emotion of his coming performance. He anticipated, with a shiver, the damp, dark shrubbery and the possible risks of detection; sought to visualise the chances and means of escape should he be betrayed; and at last dropped into a fitful doze, from which he was aroused by the train stopping at Maidstone. The night was clear now, and a bright moon had risen.

Mellinge was but two stations beyond Maidstone, and the young actor waited about until he had seen the house-agent and his client drive off before he started on his lonely walk to the park.

It was now barely half-past ten, and the ghost was not due to appear until midnight. He became fussily nervous about the accuracy of his watch, compared it two or three times with the station clock, and then walked in leisurely fashion across the fields to the park railings that enclosed Onslow Place. He halted there

ILLUSTRATING "THE HAUNTED GHOSTS"



"He had reached the further end of the terrace successfully . . . when a smothered ejaculation from the shadows just below
. . . disconcerted him altogether"

and smoked a cigarette before plunging into the park. A tramp passing by stopped and asked him for a match. The actor, with propitiatory anxiety, gave him two cigarettes as well, which defeated his intention, and induced the tramp to stop and talk. Thus he was forced to go a little way out of the direct path in order to escape observation while he climbed the railings.

At about half-past eleven he reached the shrubbery, some distance from the house, and there began to change his clothes. He had hit upon this spot during his daylight inspection of the park, feeling that escape—should escape be necessary—would be easier if he was not handicapped by having his clothes so near the house. The walk with his bag across the park had heated him, and he began to shiver a little by the time he was dressed. Then he traversed the rest of the way, fully tricked out as a Tudor gentleman of sinister aspect and intentions, and gained the bushes that grew right up to the terrace wall.

From his hiding-place in these bushes he could observe the long-shuttered windows of the west wing. The pre-arranged signal for his appearance was the opening of the shutters of the library. A light wandered about tediously in some of the upper windows long after the actor had expected his signal. The wait, as he stood there in the cold, dark shrubbery, cloaked, and with sword and lantern in hand, all alert, seemed interminable; but at last a section of the shutters of the middle window was slowly opened a cautious inch or so. He could see nothing more than the hand that opened it.

With a beating heart and a high and inspired resolve, feeling intensely indeed the dramatic quality of his situation, the young actor emerged from his concealment. His stocking feet made no noise save the slightest brushing rustle as he mounted the three stone steps of the terrace and passed along, with averted face, towards the windows of the library, his cloak held mysteriously about his shoulders with the hand that gripped the sword. The belated midnight had arrived. The stable clock began to chime, and the fateful hour was beaten out upon a harsh and tuneless bell.

Carried away by the excitement of his part, the young actor dismissed his fears. He even went so far as to make a slight and unrehearsed pause before the crack in the shutters of the middle window, behind which he knew expectant eyes were watching. The kindly moon threw his slim shadow behind him against the wall of the house, and rendered very effective his black, cloaked silhouette.

So far, so good. He had reached the further end of the terrace successfully, and, pausing there, upheld his sword, made the downward first stroke of the Cross, and would have added the horizontal line, when abruptly the situation so tensely sustained swooped and broke.

A smothered ejaculation from the shadows just below him caused his rigid features to relax, his sword hand to tremble, and disconcerted him altogether.

"My God!" was the remark that came to interrupt him so effectively; and he looked down in time to see a dark figure shoot off desperately through the bushes away from the house.

He followed precipitately this vanished figure into the shrubbery; for at that moment, the tall window of the library was thrown open with the protesting screech

of dried wood and unoiled cord-wheels, and a harsh, nasal voice said, "Gee-whizz, Mr. Stapleton! that spectre's a perfect pomegranate!"

To say that the actor ran is merely to evade the verbal feats necessary to describe his flight. Breathless and terribly excited, he floundered through the bushes, turning aside here and there as the pathway varied, his hose-clad legs scratched by thorny shrubs, glad at heart that so far he had escaped capture, scared and amazed by the figure he had surprised, and determined not to bother about his clothes for the time being, but to make certain his escape from possible pursuit.

He had been so utterly taken aback by the figure he had encountered, that the American's exclamation as he had opened the window had only just penetrated his perception. It seemed to imply that his presentation of the ghost had been successful. That is how he interpreted it as he stood at last leaning against a tree, far from the house, regaining his breath and his self-control.

Nothing occurred to interrupt this recuperative pause, and eventually he made his way to the spot where he had left his clothes. So far had he recovered, indeed, that he pulled on his trousers as deliberately as he would have done at home, scarcely bothering now about the man he had surprised at the end of the terrace, and only anxious to meet the house-agent at the inn and hear his account of the affair.

A systematic disposal of his ordinary clothes, assisted by the moon, made his dressing a relatively simple business; and, with the revival of his confidence, he began to laugh over the discomfiture of the person he had surprised in the shrubbery.

"Peeping Tom got his deserts that time," he said, and laughed aloud at the memory of that scared and hurried retreat.

"But, by Jove! the fright was mutual. What a mercy it didn't happen before the show! It would have fluffed the whole thing. Wonder what the deuce he's thinking now?"

And again he chuckled to himself at the thought of recounting the affair to the house-agent at the inn.

His enjoyment was suddenly and rudely interrupted.

From the darkness behind him came a deep sigh that was almost a groan, a sound that bit into the quiet tranquillity of the night, and sent his heart pounding and strung his nerves tense with fear. Then, as he stood there, startled and wondering, a shadow moved across the moonlit grass at his feet; and, turning, his frightened eyes beheld a figure that seemed to turn his blood to ice.

It was the ghost. The real ghost!

It was advancing, slowly and inexorably, upon him, a silent and terrifying thing, a dark and tenebrous shape, silhouetted against the moonlight, a reality which no snatched-at courage could dissipate nor commonsense appeals dispel. On it came, and on, still silent and ever more fearful. The actor gave a strained and smothered groan, and his nerveless fingers abandoned the buttons he was essaying to do up.

At last this apparition halted, and, in a frozen terror, the actor watched it. For a few seconds, that seemed eternal, these two figures faced one another.

Standing there—silent, his black and closely cloaked figure erect, a slightly mocking smile on his pale face, his sword held out stiffly before him with the point touching the ground, the apparition in Tudor dress regarded him.



"At last this apparition halted, and, in a frozen terror, the actor watched it—"

Then suddenly the spectre laughed, a wholesome laugh that dispersed the actor's desperate fear, and said, "Tit for tat, you know!" in a voice cultivated and friendly.

"But what on earth induced *you* to do it?" the stranger asked, coming up in a sociable manner, and examining the sword and lantern the actor had abandoned.

"Well, if it comes to that," he said, defensively, "who are you?"

"No, no," said the other. "You first!"

And so, at length, under the stimulus of the newcomer's friendly manner and amiable personality, the actor told his tale.

"By Gad! that's awfully funny!" said the second ghost; "that's exactly why I took it on. Only, I can't see why you should have troubled to come all down here to do it. You see, I'm a doctor really, and Onslow Place is in my practice. Naturally, it means a good deal to us down here to have the house tenanted. I heard from the housekeeper, who's a patient of mine, what the new tenant was like, and that he was coming down to-night. I guessed *why* at once, and got my things, and came along prepared to do my duty towards myself and the countryside. But, by Jove! you did give me a turn! I thought it was the real

thing this time!
Thought our ghost had
come back again. He's missed
the last few years, they say.
You did it jolly well, too! And how sporting
of you to change out here! I never thought of
that. I probably scared half the village on my
way."

"Is it safe to strike a match here?" said the actor.
"I'm dying for a smoke!"

The appearance of this other man seemed in a curious way to cap the whole affair, and to exonerate him from any further misgivings he may have had. The two ghosts went off together, as ghosts should, talking and laughing by turns in most unghostly tones.

The next morning, when the house-agent rejoined the actor at breakfast at the inn, he there and then presented him with a cheque for ten pounds.

"I'm going back by the early train," he said, "to see about the agreement."

"Then, he's taken the house, all right?"

"Taken it!" said the house-agent, rubbing his hands; "he wants to *buy* it! And, when my commission's paid, I'll send you another five."

HORACE HORSNELL

"MARY TAKE CARE OF YOUR HANDS"

The
Bystander
Short Story.

"REMEMBER your hands, Mary — always remember your hands." Then she turned away, gave a little heart-broken sigh, and died, her face towards the faded pink roses on the wall paper.

I sat perfectly still—staring, because I had never been alone with death before. What was I supposed to do, and why didn't her hair change? Something always happened to people when they died. They shrivelled up like a dry leaf, and took the first strong wind that blew towards eternity. But mother did nothing. Down the coverlet that surged across her back like a badly washed snow-drift trailed a tiny line of orange pips, because she had been eating oranges just before she died. At the foot of the bed lay some magazines with yellow and red covers—she'd been reading. The coppery notes of a barrel-organ danced up and down the street, and the orange pips slipped down the little ravine of coverlet as though longing to dance in unison. Hot sunshine on the floor and one fly buzzing in an exalted ecstatic key somewhere near the ceiling. Nothing else, but the dead woman, who studied the wall-paper with furious intensity, and wore a tiny strap of yellow orange pips across one shoulder. Had she taken a train?—bridged the river at one bound?—or was she asking God at that very minute to subscribe to her inexpensive funeral? And she hadn't commended me to Providence before she went—only said:

"Mary, always remember your hands."

There was an indecent hastiness about everything connected with her funeral. Two aunts rushed in as though for days they had been waiting round the corner all ready dressed and tearful for the event. Someone rippled down the blinds like rivers of striped cotton, turning the flat a sick, jaundiced yellow. A few flowers like stiff white wine-glasses on wire stems snowed their way into mother's room and posed around her face with formal unwillingness. And I took care of my hands. There wasn't anything else to do. The world held nothing but mother's coffin, cold cream, and orange sticks. It was then that the aunts organised a systematic hunting-party with me for the game. They hounded me from my washstand on to the cushioned thicket of the sitting-room divan. From the white tiled peaks of the bathroom's safety they drove me forth, and then one afternoon they found me sitting by mother's side with a nail file. There they left me—saying I was mad. . . . I wanted mother to see her own funeral, because she would have



BY ARCHIBALD SULLIVAN

laughed. She only had three treasures in all the world. Hands—eyes—and a sense of humour. The last would have come to her then and grown plump with nourishment. It didn't rain that day—it blazed till the black horses seemed to have broken fragments of rainbow grafted into their skins, and the sun striking living topaz from every particle of brass and jet. There was only one carriage, and the thing in front that had once been mother glinted hard and metallic in the sunshine.

On either side of me the aunts rustled in their crape. The black grapes in my hat tinkled every time I moved, till I could stand it no longer. Very slowly I dragged off my hot gloves and began massaging my finger-tips. Aunt Joan gave a shrill cough that soared through the dusty heat like a bird.

"Mary, you mustn't—you really mustn't. However can you give attention to your hands when—"

"She told me to," I interrupted, "told me to take care of my hands, and I'm not going to waste any time about it."

"Hands, indeed!" said Aunt Emily, "a lot of good they'll be to you now. You've got to work, child. Take a position somewhere, and work with those pink-and-white hands you're so tremendously proud of."

"I won't work," I said calmly, "never. It's prettier and easier to starve, and it doesn't ruin one's finger-nails."

"But you've got nothing," they shrilled in unison, "absolutely nothing!"

"Except my hands."

And it was then the cemetery flashed through the sun like the upset toys of a baby angel.

So they hid her away in the clay-streaked soil that reminded me irresistibly of grease paint, while the clergyman flapped the white wings of his surplice, struggling between hay fever and the pathos of the Burial Service. After that we came back to the flat, where the aunts fought like two old crows over the glittering remains of mother's jewellery.

Suddenly I remembered there weren't any emery boards in the flat. I went out to buy them.

"What happened after that?" he said; "tell me!"

He had taken the ivory-tipped brush from his mouth to speak, and now put it back again.

"Happened?" I repeated, "nothing happened. That was the awful part. A woman can always face one tragic incident after the other with a certain amount of bravery, but it's the sitting back in a chair and allowing time to scamper past like a small brown mouse that wears her out in the end. You see, I wasn't quite sure if mother had gone to Heaven or not, so there wasn't any sense in believing everything was for the best."

"And so?"—he left the end of the sentence open for me as though it were a little door.

"I just lived for my hands. So many beautiful women in pictures had such appalling ones—hands that even a clever painter couldn't do anything with—that I decided to rent mine."

"Oh!" he said, and went on painting.

The big studio was very quiet—even to colouring. Here and there a bit of brass winked with a golden eye or a fold of embroidery sang a song in a deep booming scarlet key, but everything else was dim and well-behaved—conscious of its artistic value—pleased in its quiet, well-mannered way to be there. A fire licked red and coppery lips in the grate, and the scent of fresh flowers and incredibly old incense went over and under everything like a ribbon. And I was there for my hands. Half unconsciously I looked down at them as they lay on the satin lap of my gown, curved around a rope of pearls.

And my hands had been painted on to how many women? I began to count—then stopped. What was it artists and critics said about them?—called them at views and private exhibitions?—hands that thought: hands that expressed moods. And beautiful women had almost everything—except hands. They'd come into studios where I sat and stare curiously at their unfinished portraits, then turn quickly and stare at my hands. It was a good thing to have a speciality—it made one a necessity. I heard the brushes rattle against his palette.

"Better rest," he said vaguely. "The right hand looks strained."

"I know," I said. "It's been thinking, and that's not professional etiquette. I shall punish it when we get home. Forfeit its cold cream at tea-time and thrash it with a rose petal. I can't tolerate insubordinate hands. It's bad enough for a woman to have a heart with that tendency—she doesn't expect it to spread through her entire system."

He laughed, lighting a cigarette with an infinite amount of detail. And as I looked at him something flashed across my heart like a rocket. I cared—cared for this big, firm-lipped man with blue mutiny instead of eyes and the hair blowing fine gold across his forehead. And it was quite the correct thing for a model to fall in love with the artist. It always happened in short stories and one-act plays. But it wouldn't matter to him whether I cared or not. I was only there for one purpose. My hands. I could nibble my heart out during the luncheon hour, but its departure would never be noticed. Men who paid women very seldom loved them. Commercial arrangements were bad for the heart. From the corner of my eye I saw his cigarette come into the grate, striking infinitesimal red stars as it fell. Little fool, wasn't I? Little fool to care, or even think of caring!

"Would you care to dine here one night?" he asked abruptly; "working late I often do."

My hands clapped very, very softly, because they couldn't help it. Care—well, anyway he had used the word.

"Of course—the food at home always frightens me because it's so terribly familiar."

"Home?" he repeated, "where's home?"

"Anywhere a woman keeps her best brushes and a powder-puff. Home to me is a small room fenced round with orange sticks and a castle of cold cream

built beside a river of Florida Water. Home is the place I look after my hands."

He came across the studio, and stood looking down—not at me, but them.

"Are you rested?"

I took up the pearl rope, twining it in and out between my fingers. He didn't care for me—the real woman capable of loving—but my hands.

Mother seemed to ride by on a somersaulting star.

"Mary," she called over her shoulder, "always take care of your hands!"

He held his champagne-glass up towards the flicker of the candle light where it shone like a golden flower.

"I don't want anyone else to paint your hands," he said.

My eyelids fluttered a little at the glowing room, the candle flames, the wine in his glass, and lastly at the man himself. Then he must want me—my hands. Woman-like, I toyed for a moment with the sensation before taking it to my heart and branding it as my very own. The big compelling man across the table had said it. Nobody else must paint my hands. How nice—how warm—how comfortable. Of course, he'd make love to me now—artists always did after saying those sort of things to models.

"Everybody mustn't paint your hands, or they'll lose their value. I want to be their specialist."

Something in me reeled and staggered, then went crookedly wandering up and down my brain. He loved me—commercially. My hands didn't represent the white twining flowers a-l' om on a loving woman, but things that would bring him money.

I shoved my chair back from the table with one long, unsteady movement.

"Oh, that's it. I'm to keep them expressly for you."

"Yes," he drawled, narrowing his eyes till they became two narrow slips of intense blue. "That's it."

For no reason at all my head nodded.

Then the thing that had been keeping all my words slaves in some secret prison gave way. They rushed at him, drunk with freedom.

"And you think you can buy the monopoly of any woman. Hire the young look at the back of her eyes and send her a monthly cheque for the apple-blossom on her cheek. If my hands hadn't cared for you, do you think we would have come here at all? What's made the success of half your pictures? My hands! You were putting on the paint and rose colour, while they were grafting in the life. And now they must lie idle till you choose to whistle them in at your studio door. Fold themselves listlessly in my lap till you feel disposed to fetter them to the shapeless wrists of some Society beauty."

"Then you only came for the money?" he rapped out.

"Oh, you big, golden-haired liar," I said very softly; "so you can even think that? I came because I cared—cared from the first day I saw you at the Van Eto's exhibition, and now I'm going to go. Funny, isn't it?"

The champagne at my elbow tottered and fell with a little revolutionary crash. The flower-vases linked each other's slender waists with silver hands and danced madly round the table, while the decanters rocked like distant ships far, far out at sea. Everything seemed set in the deep clasp of distance, as though it were a jewel. The round table was the moon of a strange

(Continued on page 32)

burning whiteness, and to its edge clung the man like something carved in ebony.

His voice rasped through the purring silence.

"And you won't wait to finish the portrait of——"

"I won't wait for anything," I said, "that's the mistake I've made all the time. I've been waiting—waiting for nothing."

Then I looked down at my hands. They were quivering like delicate carvings—carvings on a tombstone.

"I didn't understand," he wrote, "didn't believe you could possibly care for me. Just when I was trying to say something last night you surged out of the room like a white summer storm. And all because I was jealous of your hands. Yes, read the word as often as you will—jealous—jealous—jealous! I simply didn't understand, because we big men built on a vast scale are often so appallingly humble. Even now what I want to ask you must of necessity be brutal. Dear Woman of the Shining Hands, will you marry me? Life holds such wonderful secrets that we ought to help each other in finding them. Ask your hands if they will allow you to marry me. If they can stand the heavy pressure of mine on their slenderness, and on their coolness (the coolness of an early white rose, I often think), the warm kisses of my lips. And I know what store you set by those hands. Ah! there you were clever, dear. A woman's beautiful hands are the most exquisite things in all the world. Will you droop them into mine and trust me? I dare not send you roses, for fear one of their thorns might prick a brilliant ruby at one of your finger-tips, and I cannot send you lilies because they are not white enough in comparison. And so I send you my love. Is it a flower?—pluck it, then, for it will do you no harm. Is it a bird?—stretch out your hand and make it prisoner, for it has a song to sing against your breast. Is it a man?—then send for him to lay his lover-lips against your own."

And what could a woman do but go?

Life for two years has run on like an exquisite coloured river from the very centre of fairyland. I have him—and I have the other. The other, who lies all lace and peach blossom-pink laughing at the sun she knows but cannot understand. And my hands? Very well, thank you—very well indeed. Perhaps because a baby has been massaging them. Even now, after two years, he says they are like flower petals.

God never intended me to have a quiet, tranquil life. But he let me think so till a few weeks ago—or was it centuries? Then he flung chaos at me in a surprise packet. I am dictating this to the nurse, who will probably think I'm mad and call in a keeper. There was a fire. That's firm, brave fact, isn't it? I'm not trying to make it dramatically charming, am I? A fire that somehow swept across the nursery like a great flaming wing towards peach blossom-pink and the tiny life in the bassinette that gurgled to see it come. I hastened towards her, flung her at the hysterical nurse, and then——. The fire turned on me. It bit me. There's no other word. It ate the lace around my wrists and twined like a golden snake in and out between my fingers. It was so pretty I was powerless. Mother shrieked from a distant star:

"Mary—remember, take care of your hands," while I looked down at it, murmuring:

"Mother—mother, isn't it fascinating?"

Then he rushed in, and the world dwindled away to the shining head of a black pin. Mother, at the far end, went round and round like a squirrel in a cage, chanting:

"Mary—remember, take care of your hands," while I kept screaming at the top of my voice:

"Queenie was there with her hair in a braid."

Then everything went up in a rocket, on the tail of which hung my baby daughter sucking a sugar-stick. After that—nothing. Just plain black full of little holes that didn't let in any light. But people moved behind the black when I was getting better. Odd words soared past it, and one day a tremendous silver hand stole over my shoulder and crumpled it up into a little ball, then threw it out of the window.

My husband's whisper was like rustling paper.

"And her hands, doctor—her beautiful white hands?"

I heard the doctor shake his head. My eyes were wide, and I didn't see anything, but I heard.

Then in another world I saw something else—my husband. Racing down stairs two steps at a time and banging the studio door. He had the face of a plaster cast. The whiteness that goes through and through. He began creeping stealthily round the room like an animal—touching things, fingering the open pages of books, adjusting a rose that had fallen from its earthenware vase. At last he came to the pictures—the pictures of women. They all had unfinished hands. Crude line waiting the perfection of detail—waiting for me. His chin sunk against his tie (a black tie with little blue spots), and he ran his whole body forward.

"Hands," he whispered. "Hands! My God! I can never finish them now."

After that someone seemed to turn out the lights, and I only knew that the doctor was very tall and the bed hot with the scorching wonderment of an individual hell. Two days after, when I was what they called "strong enough to stand the shock," they brought me his letter. Mother was writhing in and out between the brass bed pillars at the time, wailing an endless litany of:

"Mary—remember, take care of your hands," but she stopped while I read it——. I didn't mind him shooting himself because big men always consider that the only way out of every difficulty. But I minded the lie:

"Dearest," he wrote, "I've got to play the coward because I cannot live to see you suffer, and love you too deeply to watch the tortured look behind your eyes when they tell you about your hands. Good-bye!"

But it wasn't that. What was it he whispered in the studio?

"Hands!" he had gasped, "My God! I shall never be able to finish them now."

Then I began to laugh. Not in happy ripples, but in shrill harsh notes of derision at life, love, and everything. Nurse came quickly to the bed. Deep in the very heart of my pillow Mother began again:

"Mary—remember, take care——"

"I can't, mother," I screamed, "I haven't got any hands to take care of!"

And she went away, never to come back. . . . The souls of good women are never allowed the luxury of wasting time.

ARCHIBALD SULLIVAN

The Real Ghost



"Sat up all night with the dead"

By HORACE HORSNELL

Illustrated by CHARLES R. SYKES

spectacles and a quiet but penetrating voice.

"I must admit," he began, speaking for the first time, "that when all is said and done, no ghost story that I ever heard could touch half the stories you find every morning in the paper. As a rule, they're so pointless. Just stupid appearances of things in sheets, or bells that ring, or furniture that moves about at night. It's all been done so often. And we never get any further. I can't help feeling that the real ghost is a much more plausible person. If you ask me, I should say that quite half the queer experiences people get are due to ghosts. Only they don't realise it. There are so many ways of running up against them, if you come to think of it; and so many different kinds of ghosts to, for that matter. Every man has some sort of experience of them at one time or another, if he only knew."

He stopped and looked at the company with a slightly questioning air, but since either sleepiness or the desire to hear him further kept the other men silent, he went on.

"I knew a man once," he said, "who had ghosts on the brain. He was a parson. I knew him well. He had a comfy little living down in Sussex, on the downs near the sea. Ideal place for a chap who liked the country and was keen on his job. But he was much more interested in spiritualism and that sort of thing. He got mixed up at one time with a set, but he chucked them because a chap they got hold of went mad at

one of their séances. But he didn't give up the business as anybody else might have done. He went in for it on his own down in the country—which was much worse. He got sort of isolated. Of course, his life was naturally rather a lonely one. He was a clever chap, and the mothers' meetings and harvest festivals and what 'not didn't really interest him. And he hadn't any real friends because all the possible people in the neighbourhood either hunted—a thing he loathed—or else had nothing in common with him.

"Of course, you can imagine it was just the worst possible sort of life for him. But he wouldn't chuck it and make a change, though he had the chance more than once. It suited his book only too well."

The speaker paused, and in the interval the young man with the stutter asked rather irrelevantly:

"Is he alive now?"

"Just wait a bit," said the stranger. "I'm coming to that. He was a bachelor, but he made himself very comfortable in the old vicarage with his books, and for a while no one complained that he neglected his job. Some people thought it a bit queer at first that he never had any friends to stay with him. But he lived all that down very soon. He was just a nine days' wonder, so to speak, in the village where nothing ever happened."

"Of course, he wasn't a bit extraordinary to meet. If you or I had met him on his rounds we'd have put him down as the ordinary type of country parson likely enough, and never bothered our heads about him. But we should have been vastly

THE last speaker, a florid young man in tweeds, wearing *pince-nez* and having a slight stutter, had just completed his rambling, unimportant statement of an apparition that had appeared to his late uncle. You know how these talks about ghosts fizzle out; how everybody becomes possessed of an uncontrollable desire to tell *his* story, and how the ball of excitement, started so briskly by some rather telling anecdote, becomes slower and less interesting as it progresses, until it stops altogether amid the yawns of the whole company.

The atmosphere, at first so affecting, which had been created by the cosiness of the inn parlour, the grateful after-dinner feeling of comfort and well-being, the darkness of the night outside and the chance remark of the first speaker, had already weakened. Each man, having told his own story, felt his enthusiasm overcome by sleepiness, and one or two had yawned quite openly during the young man's laborious history.

A stranger, who had not dined at the inn and who had been sitting at the table writing letters during most of the talk, suddenly drew his chair into the circle by the fire and picked up the discussion at the point where the young man reluctantly had left it.

He was an ordinary looking man, with sandy hair, gold-rimmed

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mistaken. He wasn't by any means an ordinary man. That affair at the *séance* had given him a bit of a shock. And for a while he did chuck the spiritualist business. But not for long. He began to collect books—all kinds of old and out-of-the-way books on the subject, and he contributed, under an assumed name, to the one or two magazines which cater for spiritualists."

"Just a sec," said a rosy-faced commercial traveller, who had been roused from threatening sleep by the narrative. "Let's make the fire up a bit."

He noisily threw on some coal while the rest of the company watched him with sympathetic impatience.

"Now then," he said.

"Well," the storyteller resumed, "things went on until bit by bit the parish business began to suffer. He'd forget to turn up at the mothers' meetings and be late for funerals; you know the sort of thing. But at the same time he began to take an extraordinary interest in the sick. I heard that he turned up late one night at a farm a good way away on the downs. The old farmer was very ill, but no one had sent for the parson. Somehow he seemed to know. And that night the old farmer died. My friend surprised the family very much by insisting on sitting up all night alone with the body, and one of the daughters declared that he talked most of the time just as though he'd got somebody in the room to talk to, though she couldn't hear what it was he said. There wasn't anybody there, of course, except the dead man. And even the girl admitted that she never heard anybody answer him. Of course, he might have been praying, and then, of course, he might not."

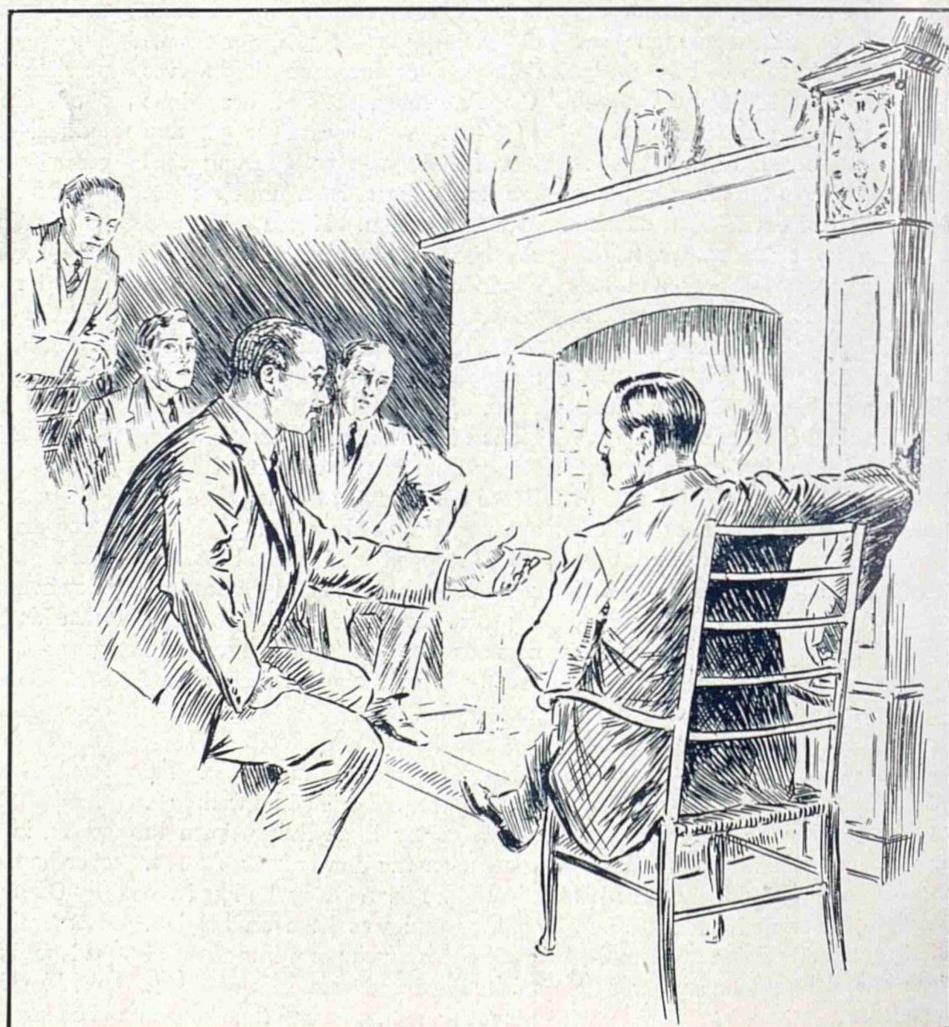
"Anyway, in the morning he went away without any breakfast, and they didn't see him again till the funeral. And they had to send and fetch him for that. That was the beginning of things. From that time on he always stayed if he could by the bedside of the dying, and sat up all night with the dead just as he had done with the old farmer. His sermons, too, were all about death and the resurrection. And they weren't particularly orthodox either. I've heard people declare that on winter Sunday evenings he'd fairly make them sit up and shiver in the pews by the things he'd say."

"Well, so it went on for a long time. He was a wonder at death-bed consolations and all that kind of thing, and if anybody fell ill, the parson was always the first to be sent for. Then, one night, some busy-body or other—a woman it was—called at the vicarage late and found him sitting in his study by

the fire, talking to a strange man. This was the first time that anybody had seen a guest at his house, and it wasn't anybody she'd seen before. So you may be sure she made the most of it. She came away with an extraordinary tale. How that this man wasn't like ordinary men. One of the things she said was that she could see the firelight through his hands which he held out to the glow. And goodness knows what else. That he hadn't any face, and that his figure cast no shadows, and that the vicar seemed very upset at being disturbed.

"Rightly or wrongly, the vicar had got somebody there, because he was seen out walking at night with a man who wasn't known to any in those parts. The two had been seen by lots of people, going into the house together after dark. Curiously enough, nobody ever saw the stranger in the daytime, and the old woman who kept house for the vicar said the story was all nonsense."

(Continued on page 44)



"No ghost story that I ever heard could touch half the stories you find every morning in the papers"

(Continued from page 42)

The speaker paused. He had told the story up to this stage dramatically but with no straining after effect. He had illustrated with gestures its chief points. His hands, too, had kept up a perpetual accompaniment to his voice, now indicating the vehemence of the preacher in the pulpit, now touching the arm of his nearest neighbour to enforce some phrase, now holding them out to the fire as the unusual visitor to the vicarage had been seen to do. A queer reminiscent smile lighted his pale blue eyes and flickered about the corners of his undistinguished mouth.

"Well, what then?" the young man with the stutter asked, breaking the silence.

"Things got to such a pitch at last," the speaker resumed, "that the village decided to lay traps and find out exactly who and what kind of man the vicar entertained so

surreptitiously. Although it was no concern of theirs they made it very much their business. They waited about in the lanes at night. They surprised the parson at all kinds of odd moments. And at such times he was never alone. But though each declared that they had seen two men, the vicar and the other, they never agreed among themselves as to what the stranger was like. The one or two women who saw him said that he was young and very handsome. The men varied much more in their accounts. Some said they knew him as a young labourer who had been dead some years. Others insisted that he wasn't anything out of the ordinary, only they'd never seen him before.

"They never did anything but talk though. People like that," the narrator observed with a note of scorn in his voice, "are unable to

concentrate on a thing for more than a week at a time. Of course, the women kept it going longest. But even they got tired in time. 'Oh, that's the vicar's familiar,' they'd say if anybody strange happened to ask about the affair."

"But what was it really?" the young man with the stutter asked, voicing the question that everybody wanted answered.

"Just a ghost!" the stranger replied; "just a familiar, as they put it."

"But do you mean to say—" the rubicund commercial began and paused.

"I do," came the hearty response. "The vicar hadn't wasted his time with all those books for nothing. Besides, he had a natural gift for the thing. He'd raised it, if you like, and there it was."

"Did you ever see it?" asked a man who hadn't spoken before.

"Oh, yes, I saw it once or twice," the speaker assured him. "But curiously enough some people could only see it in a mirror. And I suppose I was one of them. Anyway, *that was the only way I ever did see it.*"

"What was it like?" another inquired.

"Quite ordinary. Just like you or me. You wouldn't have noticed anything different about it from an ordinary man."

"But you said," the young man protested, "that the woman who saw it first said it was . . . that she could see the firelight through it, and that it hadn't any shadow!"

"That's true enough," the stranger said. "But that was only at the beginning. It grew more definite and like a real man as time went by. They do, you know. It's only new ghosts that startle you. That's the very point I wanted to make, because most people fall into the same error. Ghosts, real established ghosts, become just like



"Anyway that was the only way I ever did see it"



"It's only new ghosts that startle you"

ordinary people—if only they get into the right hands, that is. And, of course, lots of them never do. It's only in the early stages that they attract attention by seeming transparent. And it's only in the early stages that they do stupid things like ringing bells and groaning and dragging chains about. You see, it's their way of attracting attention. But once they've established themselves they drop all that. They don't want to attract attention then."

"But—" the young man protested involuntarily.

"Of course there are elementals and funny little beasts like that who knock furniture about and tap tables and pinch people in the dark. But they aren't real ghosts. We know all about them."

There came another pause, tense with unspoken and inarticulate curiosities.

"But what happened?" somebody said at last.

"To the vicar, I mean. Is he still alive?"

"No," said the stranger. "He died."

"And is that all?" the young man with the stutter asked, feeling

defrauded, and yet at the same time hoping it was.

"That's all about the vicar," the stranger said, getting up and gathering his papers together. He went towards the door, and would have gone, but the company insisted on his telling them all he knew.

"What became of the ghost?" one asked.

"Was it ever seen again?" said another.

"Oh, yes, often," said the stranger at the door, and, pausing, he looked them all in turn gravely in the eyes.

"Good night, gentlemen," he said. "Lots of people have seen it since."

A cold draught blew into the room as he opened the door. Then as he went out he turned and, in answer to the baffled wonder of their expressions, added:

"You see, I'm the ghost!"

And went out.

HORACE HORSNELL



"You see I'm the ghost"

THE Emperor lay dying. Three generations he had ruled. Three generations had greeted his coming and goings, his public appearances, proclamations and anniversaries with Papa Haydn's hymn. Tragedy after tragedy

had dogged his footsteps. The doom of the Imperial and Royal House had struck down one after another children, wife, grand-children. Unto the third and fourth generation. . . . Why and by whom was the black curse laid on his House? What monstrous crime had been sown for the reaping of such a harvest? Rumours there were and are, but none save the Emperor himself knew the faces of the Furies driving him so remorselessly from desolation to desolation. He stood amidst the ruin of his House, a solitary, sinister figure. Yet this was the strangest part of all: he and he alone availed to hold in bonds a disintegrating nation. That cadaverous figure-head called forth and held the unwilling loyalty of Czech and Slav, Pole, Magyar, and Teuton. His hands grasped the threads of empire. Had he, in some secret pact with the Devil, bartered all else for power? No one knows. No one will ever know. Power he had enjoyed, and long life—in a stony wilderness with all laid waste about him. But when those hands should loose their grasp. . . . Not a statesman in the world but looked to see the warring elements of that unhappy nation fly at each other's throats like enemy dogs. Not only that, but the country was at war, a war arrogantly declared and barbarously fought. Ruin threatened from without and, when those hands should fail, dissolution from within.

And now the old man lay dying. Clustered about his bed stood statesmen and physicians, an anxious group.

"Is there no hope?" asked the Premier. The Court physician shook his head.

"None. Absolutely none."

"Has everything been tried? You have neglected nothing?"

"We have exhausted every resource. Look at him—he is half embalmed already."

The Premier gazed at the shrunken body, the earthy parchment-like skin, the skeleton hands. Surely it was a mummy, not a man! There was no sign of life save the slow, painful breathing, hardly perceptible to the untrained eye. The statesman frowned, shrugged his shoulders angrily.

"How long can he hold out?"

"Not more than six hours—probably less."

The little group of men stood in dismayed silence, their eyes fixed on the hopeless struggle. Ever and again, as they watched, it seemed that the breathing had ceased, but it went on again, interminably, as though compelled by a hidden, indomitable will. The night wore on. Just before dawn the change came. The Court physician, watch in hand, his finger on the failing pulse, compressed his lips. All bent anxiously forward. A sigh, almost of relief,

The Mummied Emperor

BY NINA TOYE

escaped them as the doctor dropped the claw-like hand and snapped his watch-case.

"Gentlemen, the Emperor is dead," he said briefly.

They consulted one another with questioning eyes. A tall man in field-

marshal's uniform, standing on the edge of the group, turned to the door. The Premier laid a hand on his arm.

"You are not going?"

"Since everything is finished. . . ."

"We must consider. . . ."

"What is there to consider, Baron? After him"—he indicated the figure on the bed—"there remains but the deluge."

"We must consider whether it can be stemmed."

"As well try to stem the Danube," said the Field-Marshal bitterly.

"Well, then, dammed." The General raised his eyebrows, and spread his hands.

"My dear Baron! Once they know the Emperor is dead. . . ."

"Hush! Don't speak that word aloud!"

The Premier turned to a young man who had detached himself from the others and was now seated in an armchair.

"May I speak seriously to your Imperial Majesty? You know, sire, that no power on earth can keep the nation together, now that he is gone. As for the war—in the end we have as much to fear from our Ally as from our enemies. There is dissatisfaction in the country, rioting—rebellion in the air. A feather would turn the scale. There could hardly exist a more inauspicious accession. . . ."

"What am I to do?" asked the young Archduke querulously. "This situation is none of my seeking—it is thrust upon me. What in God's name do you want me to do? Abdicate?"

"Heaven forbid!"

"What, then?"

The Premier looked slowly about the intent circle.

"Listen, sire. The Emperor is dead, but no one outside this room knows it; no one need know. So far as the world is concerned, he is still alive; he must so continue. So long as he lives, the deluge is dammed."

"But that is impossible. It is bound to leak out."

"Why? Who has seen the Emperor during the last six months? The Court physicians, his confidential valet, ourselves—and you, sire. If we keep the secret—and stranger have been kept before now. . . . Think of the Iron Mask. . . . What has the Emperor become during the past few years: a myth, a legend—which we perpetuate. Believe me, sire, it can be done. . . ."

In the end the Premier's confidence and persuasiveness overruled doubt. His "What else have you to propose?" proved unanswered.

In low voices they discussed the pros and cons, while dawn crept lividly up the sky. They clustered about the Heir and the Premier, gesticulating, whispering without so much as a glance for the bed and its burden.

The confidential valet was summoned, a man grown grey in the service of the Emperor. His hard face showed no emotion until the mummy-like figure caught his eye.

"Dead!" he exclaimed. "His Imperial Majesty. . . ."

The Premier stepped forward and dropped his hand on the man's shoulder. His nails bit into the flesh below the collar-bone.

"You are mistaken," he said in a firm, even voice. "His Imperial Majesty is not dead, he will not die. On the contrary, he is better. The crisis passed favourably in the night. Do you understand?"

The valet looked from his dead master to the Baron with bewilderment changing into comprehension. "Excellency. . . ."

"Do you understand?" repeated the Premier harshly.

"Yes, Excellency."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, Excellency. His Imperial Majesty is not dead. He will not die."

The Premier scrutinised the cold grey eyes turned to his, gave a satisfied grunt, and released the shoulder.

"That is well." He motioned to the physicians.

"Gentlemen, your bulletin, please. A distinct amelioration in the Emperor's condition—anything else you like. And the body must be embalmed.

Discussion followed. Salts of mercury. . . . Formalin. . . . The Baron grew impatient.

"Gentlemen, that is your affair—but whatever you do must be done quickly. There is no time for delay. We will leave you to your task."

"One moment," said the Archduke. "Baron, what will you do for the signature? A dead man cannot sign papers."

The Premier smiled sceptically.

"I am not a forger. There is the Privy Seal. And now to spread the good news."

The company filed out in silence. Within the hour one of the physicians had gone and returned again with the necessary paraphernalia. In another hour the Emperor lay as he had lain during the night, as he would lie for months to come.

So the plot was hatched, but in spite of all care, in spite of bulletins signed and countersigned, in spite of letters bearing the Imperial seal and interviews divulged with seeming carelessness by Premier and Archduke, rumour of the death spread. A new disquiet shook the country.

"If the Emperor is so much better, why do we not see him?" queried the people. Eager crowds, clamouring for a sight of the

national fetish, thronged the palace square. Disaster threatened.

"What is to be done?" asked the anxious Archduke. "My dear Baron, the game is up."

"They must see him."

"Impossible. If they see him they will know."

"It must be managed," declared the Premier. "If they don't see him they will know."

He called the doctors to conference. Meanwhile the crowd grew more insistent. Shouts arose.

"If the Emperor is not dead, let him come out to us. When we see him we will believe."

"Why not have them dispersed?" argued the Archduke. "A squadron of cavalry—" The Premier cut him short with a snarl.

"Sire, you are mad. . . . No, he shall show himself to his people. It is the only way. Let his valet dress him."

The young Archduke shuddered. The physicians' faces were white and grave.

Presently the clamorous people became aware of a stir at the Emperor's window; the curtains parted. The onlookers waited breathless. Then the impossible happened. The Emperor appeared at the window. He stood in full view for more than a minute, a galvanised grin on his haggard face. Then, in answer to the sudden uproar of cheering he bowed his head, he raised his hand and waved it with a curious stiff movement. The curtains fell back into place. But he had shown himself, they had seen him. The Emperor was alive!

Within the room the Court physician and the valet replaced the body on the bed, untied the guiding cords of the Imperial marionette. The Premier smiled cynically as the Archduke wiped beads of sweat from his forehead.

"What did I tell you, sire?" he murmured.

"All very fine," said the Archduke, "but what of the next time? Baron, is the game worth the candle?"

"If Paris was worth a Mass. . . . The next time is a long way off. Anyhow, we have killed the rumour."

Scotched, perhaps, but not killed. The people were satisfied for a time, but some rumours die hard, especially if any have interest in reviving them. That is why so much of the Emperor's correspondence with his Allies and connections has been made public. That is also the reason why the Allied Emperor recently found it necessary to visit his aged partner in iniquity, and to spend so many hours closeted with a mummy in a formalintainted room. A pleasant interview it must have been, between the quick and the dead. NINA TOYE



Photograph
Wrather and Buys
MISS EVELYN HOPE
Who is playing the principal part in "The Joan Danvers," the new play by Capt. Frank Stayton, which was successfully produced at the Duke of York's Theatre last week

THE Westshire Yeomanry were stationed on the East Coast.

"A" squadron was billeted in the village of Link; the officers lived at the Grange.

Link Grange was supposed to be haunted. Every Saturday night clanking footsteps were heard along the corridor of the west wing. The explanation of this was simple. An underground passage ran from the west wing of Link Grange out to the sea front. When all was still at night this corridor carried in a sort of telephonic manner the echo of footsteps along the front, making them sound as though they were going down the corridor. Every Saturday night the coastguard made his way unsteadily home along the sea front from the village public. The ghost of Link Grange was a favourite joke with the officers of "A" squadron, and was systematically played off on any newcomer.

One fine day Lieut. Duncan James arrived at Link for attachment to "A" squadron pending orders to proceed overseas. Immediately on arrival he was granted three days' leave to purchase foreign kit, and at the end of this period returned from London with an expensive outfit, which included a heavy Colt revolver. He was showing this revolver proudly to his brother-officers before dinner, when one of them, looking at the calendar and seeing it was Saturday, said:

"By Jove! you may need that to-night, old chap, we've put you to sleep in the haunted room."

The supposed habits of the ghost were then recounted to him. Duncan James, who scented practical jokes and wished to pass the night in peace, pulled out his revolver, and from his pocket produced three heavy bullets, with which he ostentatiously loaded the weapon.

"These are the only three bullets I've got. They are sending on the rest, but I guess they will be good enough for any spook. That revolver, boys, is going on the table by my bed to-night."

The Three Bullets

By CUSTOS

At 11.30 p.m. Duncan rose to go to his room.

"Well, good-night, old bird," said Mainway, one of his brother-officers, "take him alive if you can."

"Yes, and keep him somewhere quiet till the morning; don't bring me down in the middle of the night to have a look at him," another added.

To get to his room Duncan had to go along the haunted corridor. It was a long, low passage leading to a turret overlooking the sea. Remembering that the ghost was supposed to walk along the corridor, he listened carefully to his own footsteps, which produced just the ordinary noise of the tread of feet upon wooden boards. On reaching his room he closed the door, and taking an electric flashlight torch from his pocket tested it, and placed it upon the table beside his bed. After which he put his revolver in a conspicuous position upon the same table, and, pulling up a chair to the fire, lit a pipe.

He did not feel in the least nervous; he merely wondered if his friends would try some joke. I have said he was not nervous, no more he was, but as his pipe grew cold and the dancing flames from the fire subsided into a dull red glow, while a south-west gale blew round the house, sighing amid the trees and creaking and groaning through rusty hinge and shaky shutter, from being meditative he grew alert.

There are times when alertness is half-way house to fear. Duncan rose and stirred the fire, then sat down again, taking solace from the leaping flames.

Hark! What was that? A distant footfall? It must be White or Mainway going to bed. No. It was coming his way. Idiots, they were coming to rag him after all, or perhaps merely to see how he was faring. But it was only one person advancing. The footsteps were at the end of the corridor, and sounded strangely distant and yet loud. What a curious sound they made, those slow measured steps, surely not the note of boot on board,



ABOVE THE MADDING CROWD

Miss Lucille Patterson, a well-known American artist, has taken up service to release men for the Army. She is shown working on a building in New York, and appears to be well content with her lot

"THE THREE BULLETS" (*continued*)

but rather the click of steel on stone.

Duncan got up from his chair, and, taking the electric torch in his hand, stood by the door.

Tramp, tramp. The steps drew nearer, deliberate and ponderous. Surely no man, however shod, could make that noise upon a wooden floor. His hand upon the latch trembled, then, taking courage as the passer-by came opposite, he flung open the door.

He touched the switch of his torch, and threw a great shaft of light across the corridor. He saw nothing. Tramp, tramp. The footsteps continued to his left. He sprang out into the passage and flashed the light in their direction. Still nothing, just the circle of light upon the floor, seeming upon the very spot whence the sound came. He followed down the passage till the metallic echo was beneath his very



BLACKPOOL MUCH NICER THAN STOCKHOLM

No wonder the Trades Union Congress has decided not to go to Stockholm. Blackpool, where it has been sitting, has clearly far greater attractions to offer

feet. He groped in the air and touched space. He rushed forward, passing the footsteps, and they followed on behind. Suddenly his foot caught a projecting nail, and he fell heavily to the ground. Tramp, tramp. They drew nearer, seeming to be coming straight towards his head. They passed right over him, yet he felt nothing, saw nothing, only heard — the slow measured beat of the heavy iron-shod boots on ringing stone. He lay there white and trembling, and the footsteps receded in the distance. Gradually they died away, and then he rose and walked shakily back to his room.

He undressed quickly, and crept into bed, pulling the clothes well over him, half-ashamed of the unknown dread within him. Ugh! He still seemed to hear ringing in his ears that awful empty tread. His heart was beating

(Continued on page 514)



**BLACKPOOL
AUTUMN SEASON**

BLACKPOOL in the Autumn Season is a poem of social life — It is full of dignified pleasures charming dull care away In September Blackpool has no equal as a social resort

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¶ THE sunsets are richly magnificent, splendid to look upon, and the seas are never to be forgotten.

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**AUTUMN PROGRAMME
.. FREE ..**

From G. BATTY, TOWN HALL, BLACKPOOL



"THE THREE BULLETS" (concluded)

violently, and he wondered that he had not fainted during that ghastly moment when he had lain prone upon the ground, the footsteps coming towards him and passing over him, intangible, invisible.

Click! What was that? He looked towards the door. Heavens, it must be the shimmering of the firelight, or had the handle really turned? The door slowly opened. "It had not been properly fastened and had come unlatched" Duncan reasoned to himself. Nevertheless he did not spring out of bed to close it again; he lay quite still and watched the widening gap.

It was only after he had been looking at the figure in white for some seconds that fear came back to him. On first catching sight of it he had felt the numbness that comes to one who has been struck a blow. There it stood in the doorway, an indefinite white pillar faintly suggestive of the human form, such as he had seen scores of times in illustrations to articles on spirit photography.

"Chuck it, Mainway," he heard himself saying in a shaky voice.

The figure glided forward a pace or two. Duncan groped upon the table for the electric torch. His hand came in contact with the revolver.

He was by now thoroughly unstrung.

He pointed the revolver at the figure, and said:

"Stop, or I will shoot!"

The figure glided forward. He aimed deliberately full six feet above the figure's head and fired. There was a loud report, followed by a light thud and something fell upon his chest. The

figure stood erect and motionless. Duncan felt with his hand for the thing that had struck him, and found a bullet.

"Must have struck the wall and rebounded," he murmured hoarsely to himself.

Meanwhile the figure, quite unperturbed, again started to glide toward him. Again he cautioned, and again he fired, this time at the thing's legs. Once more there was a report, once more the figure stopped, and once more a bullet fell upon his chest.

"Missed and rebounded again," he murmured, but with no conviction.

The figure was now within three feet of him, and leaning forward in his bed he aimed the revolver point-blank at the centre of its body and pulled the trigger.

For the third time the bullet fell upon the bed and the figure glided on towards him, till reaching the bedside it stooped over him, laughing.

"You silly old ass," said Mainway, "you are only firing blank. We took the bullets out of your cartridges before mess, and I've been chucking one on the bed each time you fired."

The other officers of "A" Squadron crowded into the room, laughing. Duncan lay very white and still.

"My God!" said the Major commanding the squadron, suddenly bending down and putting his ear to his heart.

"He's dead."

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WHEN my old friend Browne told me that he had bought Wraith Castle, I was not deeply stirred except to wonder what a confirmed bachelor, whose life had been lived largely in the city, wanted with a great old place of that kind. But when he asked me to spend Christmas with him I began to sit up and take notice. Wraith Castle is on the Welsh border, in a remote part of the country, and ten miles from a railway station. Presently I turned up a local guide—to discover that Wraith was "Eleventh century, had been in the possession of the Wraith family for a thousand years, and was said to be haunted."

I had hesitated to accept, but this final touch in the guide-book decided me. I went. Wraith is a fine old fabric in the Norman style, and when I approached it in the gathering dusk I was agree-

ably thrilled and perhaps a little hopeful. But when I mentioned the matter to Browne his face suddenly clouded. It was a large florid face with keen eyes—not at all the face of a man of imagination. And yet, as he answered me, I found myself reconsidering all my settled ideas about my friend.

"Ghosts? No. I'm afraid not—" He broke off.

"You mean," I asked, "that you regret—?"

He smiled uneasily. And then I got the astonishing explanation—the clue to the new revelation of character for which I had been searching.

"Yes—you see, living all one's time in the city, one loses a good deal of romance. And now that

I've reached middle life I suppose I'm searching—and well, I find one can't buy—"

"Ghosts, as well as bricks and mortar?"

He nodded. "When I came here I was *assured* by the agent not only that the place was historical but that there were ghosts! But, well, they've flitted." He laughed.

"Perhaps I—" I began.

"What! when I can't?" he cried, suddenly scornful. "That's egotism run mad isn't it? No, if I thought you came down here to see spooks, and if I wasn't delighted to see you, I'd say turn about at once. But as I am delighted to see you, come along in!"

It was not until we were retiring that the subject came up again—and this time it was Browne who mentioned it.

"Hope you don't mind," he said with a laugh. "But I'm putting you in the Red room. You see I'm not using the whole of the house just yet. Only been in it a month."

"Mind? Why should I mind?"

He paused for a moment. "No reason," he said, then, "except that that is one of the rooms that the agent said was haunted. Not that you need fear. I've seen nothing!" He spoke quite wistfully.

"Perhaps I'll have better luck," I said, gaily. But when he had left me alone in the great gaunt room with its heavy decorations in gloomy crimson, and with its deep shadows in the corners, I don't know that gaiety was my prevailing quality. When I was at last in bed I know that I hesitated long before I turned the light out.

I must have been asleep for some time when I was awakened in the usual way on these occasions—that is to say, I found myself opening my eyes and looking about me without knowing why. I had heard no noise and yet I was sitting up and staring into the darkness. My hair seemed to be erect, my blood frozen. Yet still I could discover no reason for my state of tension. I was about to creep beneath the clothes again when something white seemed,

(Continued on page 88)



A TOUCH OF 'FLU'!

BY HARRY WOOLLEY

THE SPOOK'S CHARTER (concluded)

for a moment, to flit by the window.

Rising in horror—

"Stop!" I cried.

For a moment it seemed to sway and then, as if it had decided to hold its ground, it stopped, a gleaming white shape before my eyes.

Summoning all my courage, "Who are you?" I cried.

"I am the ghost of Albert De Wraith."

"The chief ghost of the castle! And so you are here after all?"

"Yes, I'm here," he groaned. And then it was that he added the astonishing statement: "But I'm picketing!"

"Picketing?"

"Yes, you may not know it but this house has five ghosts—the White Lady, who haunts the East Terrace; the Old Earl, who has exclusive use of the South Terrace; the Murdered Washerwoman, killed in 1493 by Hugo De Wraith for rusting the steel vizer which he had sent to the laundry; the Purple Jew, and myself. But this year the National Union of Spooks have ordered a strike!"

"And that is why—?"

"Why the new owner cannot find any ghosts at work on the premises? Precisely. And until all our demands are conceded he will continue to look in vain! I keep out of his way—do no work for him, and if you were not a visitor you would not be permitted to see me either..."

"But why are you striking?" I asked using my most conciliatory tone.

"To remedy our long-standing grievances."

"Which are—?"

"Our employers are the Living; from them—to mention the lesser points first—we ask for Recognition in the Christmas numbers. We had it once. But it has gradually been filched from us. Each year what are called ghost-stories are pushed away more and more to the back of the paper. We ask for Page One again. Next we request

that our personal feelings shall be considered. We want respect.

At one time Christmas house-parties shivered at a mere mention

her right round the terrace only the other night.

"Then we want to be consulted before we are given a new master.

Imagine the feelings of a ghost who has been in one employ for, say, eight hundred years when he finds a profiteer in pork set over him suddenly. There's your friend—"

I hastened to assure him that Browne was actuated by the kindest feelings towards his ghostly neighbours, would treat them with the profoundest respect, and would welcome their appearance at any time that was convenient.

"Oh! well, then, I will consider him favourably, but at present he will have to do without my services. All ghost-employers must do that. Which brings me to my—our supreme demand." He seemed to gurgle with mysterious emotions. "Yes, this is our Final Demand—

the Abolition of Coercion by Conan Doyle and Oliver Lodge. We say that for the future no ghost shall be dragged from the other world to gratify the curiosity of the Living. If we have business here, as the White Lady has or as I have, well and good, but no compulsion. Let Doyle beware! If—"

I don't know what followed. What I do know is that Browne was looking down at me and asking whether I usually screamed out and woke the house when I had nightmare.

"I've seen the ghost!" I cried.

"Nonsense!" he answered, going on soothingly, "get to sleep. Didn't I say that the local ghosts don't show up nowadays? You'll be telling me next"—he called out as he hurried back to bed, "that you know why they're on strike!"

"Well, as a matter of fact," I began with dignity, "I do know!"

But he hadn't waited. F.E.



BY HART HARVEY
"CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE"

of us. Now, even a flapper will run out alone to see if one of us is about—the White Lady had a horrid little minx chasing

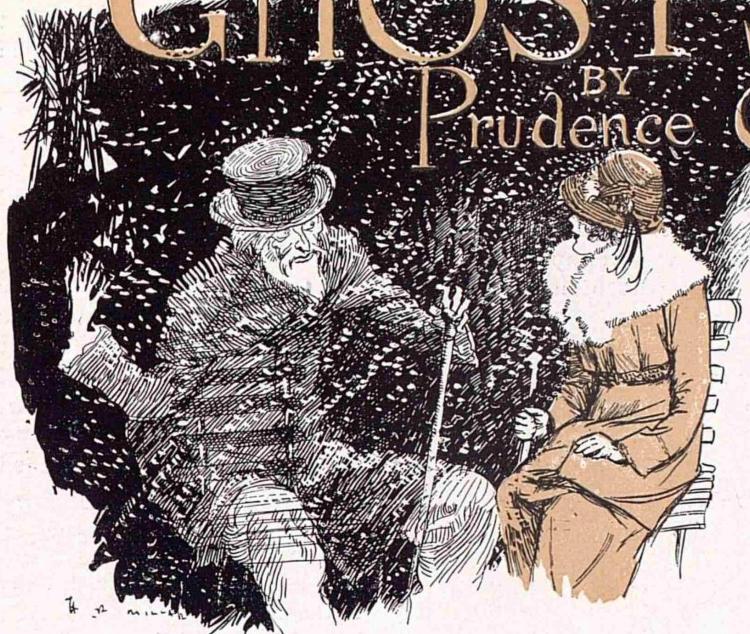


BY PETER FRASER

CHEAP WINES!
Wife: "Hoo shoot takin' hame a drap o' fancy wine—champagne, may be?"
Sandy: "Hoots, woman, ye're clean daft. Ye're makin' a gran' mistak' if ye think I'm gain' tae squander a hail half croon on a bottle o' champagne."

GHOSTS!

BY
Prudence O'Shea



ILLUSTRATED BY H. R. MILLAR

IT was Christmas Eve, and almost closing time in Kensington Gardens.

Twilight had deepened among the trees, while a soft peppering of snow had begun to fall. There was a hush, too, which enwrapped Angela Hayes, and isolated her from all the world, so that she felt herself to be stepping over the surface of a vast, animated Christmas card. And wandering so, her mind the peaceful storehouse of every romantic impression, she came across an old man sitting quietly upon a secluded seat beneath a shivering tree.

As soon as their eyes met the old man called out, with a certain gallant gaiety: "Why . . . Miss Hayes! This is indeed a pleasure."

Angela stopped in surprise; and as she looked towards the stranger she saw that the iron lathes of the chair upon which he sat showed through the rusty black of his garments. Then, smiling with pleased surprise, she extended her hand, and moved towards him. "Fancy!" she exclaimed "A ghost!"

"Yes. Won't you sit down?"

"Thanks awfully." She chose the chair beside him.

Still wringing her hand the old man said with a naïve eagerness: "How really nice to meet you! . . . And just when I began to think that the day would end fruitlessly."

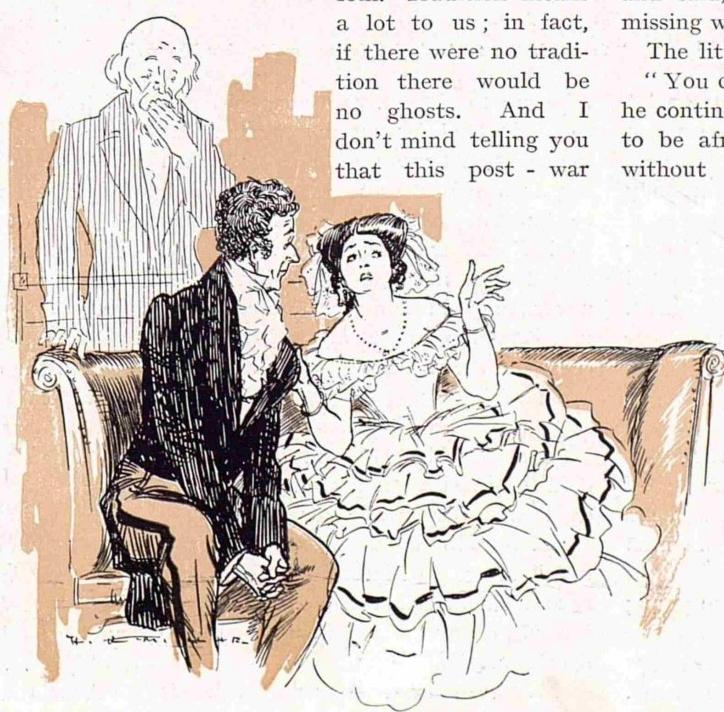
"Really? What sort of day have you had?"

"Oh shocking! It's real nice to talk to someone. I was here first thing this morning. We like to be, you know. The bells were ringing at St. Mary Abbott's and, if I may use the expression, the stage was beautifully set. But . . . I don't know . . . it was all a failure."

"I'm awfully sorry. How do you mean . . . a failure?"

The old man drew his cloak more closely round him before replying, and then said: "Well, you see, it's like this. You young people don't realise that we ghosts are conservative

folk. Tradition means a lot to us; in fact, if there were no tradition there would be no ghosts. And I don't mind telling you that this post-war



"Of how they saw us—and touched us"

civilisation is hitting us pretty hard."

"It's hitting us all pretty hard."

"I know . . . I know. But we have no Union or Publicity Agent. We've just ourselves, and each Christmas Eve makes things worse for us."

"I am sorry. I do my best for you."

"I know, Miss Hayes. I know. In . . . in the place where I come from we all read your charming little stories. You show us to be most agreeable people . . . not violent or anything like that. Oh yes . . . we're very grateful to you for all you've done for us. But the trouble is that we are gradually slipping from the world's affairs. For instance . . . I've come here regularly every Christmas Eve for years. We were welcome guests once; we were expected! Wherever we lurked, whether it was under the bridge of moats, in old banqueting halls, or among trees in woods, we were eagerly sought out. Christmas Eve was our triumph! And I don't mind telling you that it is just as delightful to be sought after now by blue-bell eyed girls with arms like moonbeams, as it was before we became ghosts. And their pretty screams when they discovered us! . . . Why, it made life worth living. Ghost-life, I mean. But all that's changing. Once we used to hang around the drawing-rooms after dinner, and listen to pretty lips telling the most shocking untruths about us; . . . of how they saw us and touched us! And of how we advanced towards them and pointed to disused wells, and said, in sepulchral voices: 'The missing will lies there!'"

The little man stretched his legs.

"You can see my point, can't you?" he continued. "These sweet girls used to be afraid to enter their bedrooms without someone looking previously under their beds . . . and that in itself is a delightful compliment to us. They fibbed for us . . . think of that . . . fibbed for us! We were, if I may say so in all modesty, the heroes of every Christmas Number."

"But . . . wouldn't you rather have the truth told about you?"

"No. Would you? . . . For the truth is that we are neglected old gentlemen. And some truths are sad, while most fibs, told anyway in Christmas Numbers, are delicious."

"Yes, I quite agree with you there."

"I'm sure you must, Miss Hayes. A fact is an unequivocal thing intended to wound or bore. But a fib! . . . Why, the most entrancing thing on earth is a pleasant fact treated with a cultivated imagination. Can I rely upon you, Miss Hayes, to repeat that in THE BYSTANDER?"

"You can."

"Thank you."

"But you were saying that the day had been fruitless?"

"Yes; it has. A few years ago I used to sit on this same seat, and everyone who passed used to nudge each other. It was flattering in the extreme. Now, with the exception of one or two nursemaids with dreams in their eyes, and one or two old gentlemen who'll soon be ghosts themselves, no one has the eyes to see us with. And even the nursemaids are frightened, and that hurts our feelings."

"I'm sure it does. And the children?"

The old man made a vulgar noise with his lips indicative of supreme contempt, and said: "I haven't had a child see me all day!"

"Not little girls?"

"Not one. They're all helping the little boys with their Meccanos."

"I am sorry. But have you no connections whom you like to visit?"

The old man's face clouded instantaneously; and trouble seemed to linger in his kind eyes. And he said: "Well . . . since you mention it, Miss Hayes, I have a connection. A son."

"Really? . . . But surely you visit him?"

"No. No, I don't! I've done a lot for that boy, but . . . I'm just not wanted."

"I simply can't understand anybody not wanting you."

The old man's hand closed over Angela's for a second, and he smiled into her young eyes, and then sighed. And he said: "Well . . . since you've been so patient with me, I'll tell you something I've never told anyone else in my life."

They settled themselves in the dusk, and Angela brushed a little snow off her shoulders, and also off the shoulders of her companion. Then the old man said:

"You see, I was married very young to a lady who was an angel; but like all angels, I suppose, she sighed for her spiritual home. Anyway, she left me. But before she went our son was born."

The old man cleared his throat.

"He was a fine boy. But soon I realised that I'd got to have a woman to make some sort of home for him . . . for myself I didn't mind. So I asked my eldest sister . . . Ephzibar . . . to come and keep house for us. The name should have warned me but it didn't. And she came."

"Now, Ephzibar was great on houses, but a home to her was something frivolous, and of the world worldly; so she set about me and my son to subdue that fleshy part of us which demanded a home."

"And she succeeded?"

"She surely succeeded. She used to

one Christmas, when I was supposed to be in these gardens, I just nipped round to his rooms and said that I knew a way of helping him. And I promised him that every time he was called in for a consultation I would stand at the head of the bed if the patient were doomed to die. That, of course, would give his professional opinion great weight. And I did and it did. And he prospered, and everything went perfectly."

"Well . . . he moved to Harley Street, and presently I read that he was engaged to be married. So the next time I was needed to stand at the head of the bed of one of his patients, I asked him if he thought he was going to be happy, and the way he answered, and the way he looked, I knew that he was expecting to walk straight into heaven the day he led her to the altar."

"And did he?"

"Before he could she fell ill, and dangerously ill, too. And you can imagine my awful grief when I felt myself impelled downwards to stand at the head of her bed when my son visited her. When he saw me there he groaned and begged me to go away. But I shook my head. And he said: 'If science fails . . . cannot my great love for her keep her with me and drive you away?' And, of course, I had to shake my head again, and then he looked thoughtful, and suddenly said: 'Father . . . Ephzibar's coming!' And it wasn't until I had run over half the world that I realised the trick which had been played upon me, and naturally, with relations strained like that, I've never liked to go again."

"I can quite understand."

Just then a sonorous voice was heard echoing over the gardens, and Angela exclaimed: "There! . . . the keepers are turning everyone out. I must go."

They both rose and stamped their feet in the cold.

Angela said: "Well . . . good-bye, and a Merry Christmas!"

"Thank you, Miss Hayes. The same to you. I wonder . . . perhaps next year at this time? . . ."

"Why, of course . . . I'd love it."

"Very well then . . . next Christmas Eve at the same place, and we'll have another talk. Good-bye."

"Yes . . . Good-bye."

Angela suddenly found herself alone, and slowly she walked towards the gates.



To church . . . to thank God for not making her like me"

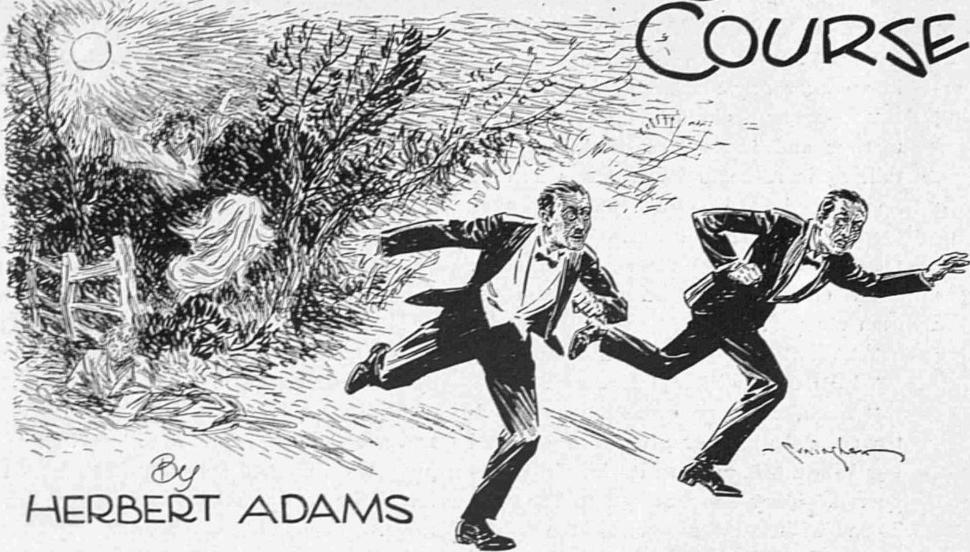
take me to church, she once told me, to thank God for not making her like me. But that was nothing. And when she drew me into an argument I used to almost die of fright in case I was right. And Ephzibar talked! . . . Ephzibar talked from morning until night. She never stopped talking. So you can quite understand that when it was my time to die I closed with the offer at once?"

"Yes."

"But I didn't like to go without doing my son a good turn, particularly as I was responsible for introducing Ephzibar into his life. So, on my deathbed I swore to him that if he would become a physician when he grew up I would do everything in my power to help him. And he promised."

"Well, at first, after he took his degree, he had rather a rough time, but that didn't do him any harm. And then,

THE HAUNTED GOLF COURSE



By
HERBERT ADAMS

Illustrations by CUNNINGHAM

"TALKING of ghosts," said Murgatroyd, solemnly, "have any of you ever played on a haunted golf course?"

"Most courses where I play," I replied, "have a bogey to every hole."

"I am glad you know that," he retorted sharply. "I sometimes feared you had forgotten it."

The other men guffawed, but my friend was not wasting time on me.

"When I speak of a haunted golf course," he went on, "I do not mean a course where the shades of departed players return to fight again the games started in this life. I mean a course chosen by a ghost for its weird peregrinations when it wanders loose in the hours about midnight."

There was a pause while the men filled up their glasses and lit their pipes, and Murgatroyd continued :

"It was on the Groatbridge links on the Yorkshire moors. An old friend of mine named Maltravers had his home there. He had often asked me down, but other things had cropped up. Then one Christmas he said he was taking two other fellows back with him and I must come too, to make a four for golf and bridge.

"Well, when you are wanted to complete a party it is churlish to refuse. So we all journeyed down together. The other men were genial enough, though they seemed rather an odd couple. One of them, George Evans, was short and fat, while the other, Henry Larkson, was well over six feet in height and was one of the thinnest men I have ever met. To accentuate the difference, "Tubby" Evans was clean-shaven and merry, but Larkson had a straggling beard and a most melancholy expression. However, we had a very cheery time, and we had been there three days before we heard anything about the ghost.

"The thirteenth tee was at the side of the churchyard, and the hole was a short dog-leg one running round a rather thickly wooded copse. The copse was guarded by a very deep bunker. The usual play was to drive out to the left and then get an easy chip on to the green.

"That day I said I would try to drive over the trees and land on the green. My caddie advised me not to, but I went all out for it. I failed and the ball fell into the jungle. Served me right, of course.

"Instead of looking for my ball, the caddie walked round on the outside of the bunker. I told him sharply to go in and find it, while I went on with my clubs. He said he would rather not because that copse was the haunt of the spook! He was a simple Yorkshire lad and was evidently scared. I asked what the dickens he meant.

"Then he told me that nearly every night a ghostie used to come out of the churchyard and run across the course and disappear into that copse!

"As you'll suppose, I laughed at him and asked if he had ever seen it himself. He swore that he had, and so had many of the villagers; they were terrified to go that way after dark and never went into the copse if they could help it.

"I could not keep the other men waiting, so I told him to come along. I repeated his story to Maltravers as a good joke, and we asked the other caddies about it. They declared it was perfectly true and were full of stories of those who had been scared by it.

"Naturally, we scoffed, but
(All rights strictly reserved)

when we had finished our round it gave us something to talk of over lunch. Evans treated it as a huge joke, but Larkson took it more seriously.

"Of course it is all imagination," he said, "but we ought to lay the ghost and so relieve the alarm of these innocent people. It is quite easy to understand why a churchyard is thought to be haunted. Besides being a burying place, all its surroundings tend to frighten nervous souls. There are its solitude and its quiet, and above all there are the queer shapes and shadows of the monuments and the trees. The moonlight on a marble column and the shifting shadows of swaying branches may easily give the impression of motion, especially to folk too frightened to wait and watch."

"That is all very well," said Maltravers, "but it would not cause the marble column to run across the course and disappear in the copse!"

"Well, we talked the whole thing over. Maltravers declared there must be some foundation for the stories we had heard and then—I don't remember exactly how it happened—Maltravers bet Larkson five pounds that he and Evans would not walk through that copse and up to the churchyard at midnight and bring back a sprig from the yew tree that grew near the marble column. Longshanks and Tubby took the bet.

"A little later Maltravers came to me and said :

"I don't want money from those fellows, but I'm going to play a trick on them. Of course I don't believe a



"He was a simple Yorkshire lad and was evidently scared"

word of the whole business, but when they go through that copse they shall see a ghost! Will you help?

"Naturally I agreed. How better could one spend Christmas Eve than in playing at ghosts? Maltravers was an ingenious fellow and during the afternoon he made some excuse for getting away. I knew he was preparing his spook.

"You have seen those toys made with crossed sticks or wires that expand or contract when you press the ends? Maltravers built his ghost like that. He got a long white nightshirt to put on the frame and he arranged it so that the

way to the deep bunker beside the copse. We reckoned we could crouch down there and, when the moment came for the ghost to show itself, we could creep along the bunker holding it aloft so that it would appear to glide through the air in an unearthly manner.

"Longshanks and Tubby started out to time and before long we heard them talking in rather subdued tones as they approached the copse. When they were well in it, Maltravers let off what were meant for sepulchral groans. They certainly sounded eerie, and the men stopped.

"What was that?" said Evans.

"An owl," declared Larkson.

"Then, as they came nearer, Maltravers did a deeper groan and elevated our ghost. They saw it, but it disappeared. They stood rooted to the spot. Then with another groan the ghost appeared again in a different place and glided towards them.

"I am going!" yelled Tubby, and he dashed away as quickly as his little legs would carry him. Larkson waited a moment or two longer, but groaning again, and waving its arms, the apparition came nearer, and without a word he turned and his long strides caught up and passed his chubby friend.

"Then the amazing thing happened: It is very strange, but if ever you dabble in the supernatural, even in jest, you seem to rouse something in your own mind you do not fully understand. It is possible to be so realistic as to scarce yourself.

"We were moving back along the bunker, still laughing at the odd figures our two friends had cut, when suddenly we both stood stock still. We were walking towards the churchyard, and there in the shadows, among the tombs, we saw the weirdest sight it has ever been my lot to behold.

"It was a phantom figure, a wraith, hardly material and yet certainly no flimsy framework like our poor make-believe. It was real, and yet it was entirely unearthly. It seemed like the figure of a woman in light drapery and with loose hair blowing around her face and head. But the weirdest thing was that the body appeared to be in two parts. They seemed to be quite detached—the upper portion and the lower portion—yet they

floated along together keeping their respective places.

"I cannot describe my feelings. As I said, we had been trying all the evening to create an atmosphere of nerves. Now it seemed as though retribution was to overtake us. My heart stopped beating and I felt a strange choking sensation. What the caddies had told us was true.

"I think Maltravers felt as bad as I did, though for a time he did not speak. Then the moon went behind a cloud. But still we could see the weird figure, or figures, dancing along. It passed out of the churchyard and through the gate by the thirteenth tee.

"It's coming this way!" cried Maltravers. "I can't stand it!" and dropping his wretched framework he bolted for all he was worth, and I was at his heels.

"At the entrance to his garden we glanced back and distinctly saw that white wraith gliding through the copse. We crept indoors. Luckily for our self-respect Evans and Larkson had already cleared off to their rooms. Maltravers looked like a ghost himself, and I expect I was as white. We each had a very stiff drink and went quietly to bed."

Murgatroyd stopped. He took a long pull at his beer mug and lit his pipe as though his tale was finished. Then Rodwell said:

"But what was the end of it all? What was the explanation?"

"I always think," said Murgatroyd, "a mystery is better left unexplained."

"No, no! You must tell us!" came a chorus from a dozen voices. I waited. It was not like Murg. to leave a tale half told.

"It was a tragedy," he said solemnly. "A poor girl who lived at the Vicarage, the parson's daughter in fact, had been up to London to have lessons in some dramatic classes. She had met an actor man who, after making love to her, had thrown her over. The shock of it and the strain of her work unhinged her mind. She came home, but to her distraught brain there apparently came the idea that if she danced out like some poor Ophelia at midnight she would in some way meet or regain her lover. She had done it for several nights and so had been seen by the villagers.

"On Christmas morning she failed to return, and she was found unconscious, but still alive, in that copse. She was taken away and after a long illness she recovered. The curious thing was that she went out all in white, but round her waist she tied a black fur wrap, a boa I believe they called it. That gave the extraordinary effect in the fitful light that her body was in two parts. I hope I will never again be scared like I was that night."



"A few minutes later we were carrying his collapsible contraption"

arms would throw themselves up as the figure rose. He got a toy balloon for the head and painted some eyes on it, and gummed a lot of fur from an old rug to make the hair. He used a good deal of phosphorescent paint. It was better, anyway, than the turnip-and-candle business one reads about, and we relied on its unexpected appearance having the desired effect.

"After dinner, Maltravers created a suitable atmosphere by telling us creepy spooky stories. Then, a little before eleven, he yawned and said he would turn in. He asked them not to disturb him when they got back—he would wait for the yew sprig till breakfast.

"I got up too, and a few minutes later we were out of the house carrying his collapsible contraption. We made our



Illustrations by BERT THOMAS

RAIN had spoilt the Christmas Eve shopping in the village of Sleevelove. Only those who were compelled by want had come in from the surrounding country, and they went home again sturilily, carrying their wet parcels through the dark, wet lanes.

Bob Bishop had a sick wife and was carrying home groceries which in the ordinary way she would have purchased. He was also carrying inside him a fair quantity of Kentish ale, and this was remembered about him when, in the course of the next few weeks, he told and re-told the following remarkable tale.

"I got to the pool that lies below where the Hall used to stand. It was raining something piercing, so I thought I'd cross the pool by the rustic bridge and cut through the park by the path I know and so save myself nigh on a mile. When I got in the middle of the bridge I think I see someone in front of me and I calls out. It had a cloak on, so you couldn't see if it was a man or a woman. I was for running away, but I got sort of stuck with my knees all wobbly. Then the figure put its head back and I got the idea it was a man. Next it put up its arms, stretchin' 'em up to the sky, just like parson does sometimes in church, and I swear I saw a face. It was an awful face. I fell down and dropped some of my things. Then I got up and ran. It was a ghost I see, or as near as I ever shall see one. What I'm telling you's without the word of a lie, because George Marden came with me Christmas morning and helps me pick up the sardines and cornflour I'd dropped where I see the ghost."

The Reverend George Cousten, rector of the parish of Sleevelove, talked of Bob Bishop's story to his wife on Christmas night.

"I don't want to talk about ghosts," begged Mrs. Cousten.

"But I'm not talking about ghosts, my dear. You and I know there are no such things. Surely you don't mind speculating as to whether Bob's vision was real or imaginary."

"He had had too much, as he often does, and it is a wonder to me that he didn't see two ghosts, not one."

Outside the window of the Coustens' snug dining-room, unknown to them, and mercifully unseen by any human being on that dark Christmas night, stood two ghosts.

One leant on the sill of the window and appeared to be listening to the talk inside. The other stood erect, his face turned upwards to the rain. The first ghost would appear to be covering the plants under the window, and the second seemed to shield a bush from the weather, but the rain beat just as heavily against these plants and against this bush as it did upon the tree-tops or any unoccupied part of the garden.

Sir Godfrey Dampier had arrived as usual at Sleevelove Park on Christmas Eve. He had been doing this since 1451, the year of his death. He had passed as usual through the wood, entered the Dark Walk and emerged on the edge of the park. From here it was his custom to descend a great sloping lawn, ascend some steps, raise his hands to heaven as it were in protest, walk in stately fashion along the terrace, and finally pass through an old disused oaken doorway into the Hall. Once inside the Hall he had to enter what was known as the Beaufort corridor, patrol it and disappear finally into a small closet, where, according to legend, Sir John Fastolfe had once hidden from an irate husband.

On this particular Christmas Eve Sir Godfrey got no farther than the edge of the park. Here, for the first time after four hundred years of haunting, he appeared nonplussed. His business was

to descend the lawn and eventually enter the Hall.

There was no longer a Sleevelove Hall. No matter what the reason, the ancient building had disappeared. True, haunting it had been a pretty dull affair for the last fifty years, as no one had been in residence during that period, but Sir Godfrey was shocked and pained. After all, you cannot go on spending hundreds of Christmas Eves in the same house and discover it to have been wiped out of existence without a certain sense of loss.

Was it possible that the old Hall had been moved but a short distance? Sir Godfrey began an investigation. He knew that he might be seen by living persons, and, as ghosts are permitted to frighten only those who dwell upon the scene of their former misdeeds, he clung for the most part to hedges and dodged behind trees if he saw anyone coming. Bob Bishop had trapped him badly. He knew there was no thoroughfare across the rustic bridge that spanned the pool, and thought he was safe in crossing it, especially on such a wet night. When Bob loomed up in the mist Sir Godfrey had hurried back. Then he recalled that ghosts must not show speed, and he stopped and made his gesture of the hands raised to heaven in protest. At that moment Bob had seen his face, dropped his parcels and fled.

The rain fell through the poor baffled ghost, but he did not feel it. Presently, however, a wind came up and he was blown into the wood. Here he clung to a tree till the tempest should pass.

"To-night," said Sir Godfrey to him-

self, "is Christmas Eve. I cannot do my usual haunting, but I imagine it my duty to remain in the neighbourhood for the usual period. Then there is the suggestive fact that to-morrow night will be Christmas night. A house of this antiquity must have a Christmas night ghost. Suppose I wait for him. Between us we may form a plan. At any rate we can both go back to eternity with the same story."

Pearl-grey light appeared above the wood some hours later, and Sir Godfery Dampier became invisible, as are all ghosts save in the dark-time.

* * * *

Christmas night was again wet and very windy, and Sir Godfery was hard put to it to keep his place in the wood. Moreover, he had to cling to a tree right on the edge of the plantation so as to command a full view of the former site of Sleevelove Hall.

At about 10 o'clock the wind and rain died down, and Sir Godfery was able to stroll about. It was the first time he had ever been away from home on Christmas night, and he wondered what they were thinking of his absence from eternity. There was as yet no sign of another ghost, but a bright moon had lit up the scene, and any visiting spirit would not be readily discernible.

It is a fact that Sir Godfery and another ghost collided and nearly passed through each other before they became acquainted.

"Hello," cried Sir Godfery cheerily, "Who are you?"

"I was just going to ask you the same question."

"Oh, I'm Sir Godfery Dampier. Died 1451. My job's a Christmas Eve job, but I'm here still for an obvious reason."

"Well, I'm Sir Francis Dampier. I committed suicide in 1581. You must be my great-grandfather."

"Not a doubt of it. How are you?"

"Oh, much as usual. You all right?"

"Capital, thanks. What on earth has happened to the Hall?"

They both gazed round upon the moonlit scene.

"Our haunting days must be over," observed Sir Francis.

"Was your haunt particularly irksome?"

"In 1581, Sir Godfery,

I hanged myself from the minstrel gallery in the great refectory. Between you and me, I had been foolish enough to conduct a traitorous correspondence with Philip of Spain, and it got to the Queen's ears."

"What queen?"

"Name of Elizabeth. She gave me the alternative of suicide or the Tower, and on Christmas night, after I had sent my wife and children to bed, I put my neck in a noose. I've had to do that every Christmas night since, and, although it doesn't hurt now, I go through exactly the same mental agony. What sort of a haunt is yours?"

"I did not kill myself. I was killed. I lent money to Cardinal Beaufort for Henry's wars, and when I asked for something back, or at any rate a little interest, I was sent a box of poisoned wine which, drunk upon the Christmas Eve of 1451, killed me and eleven guests at a sitting. I died unshaven, and have been forced to haunt my old home every Christmas Eve since. It is not a difficult task, but an unhappy one."

The moon disappeared and now the two ghosts were clearly visible to each other. Sir Godfery was tall and gaunt

and heavily cloaked. Sir Francis was of middle height, somewhat stout and bloated, but he had a good leg and wore his ruffle, doublet and hose as if they had grown upon him.

The wind stirred and the ghosts swayed away together.

"I see no reason now," observed Sir Godfery, "why we should not go home. Your story will corroborate mine. We can scarcely be punished before a commission of enquiry has been sent."

"We shall be told that we ourselves constituted a commission of enquiry. If the Hall has been destroyed we must be able to prove it."

"What on earth can we do?"

"Well, a place as ancient and historic and as beautiful as Sleevelove cannot be destroyed without some record being made of the fact. There are now, although you may not know it, sheets published bearing printed news."

"Ah, yes. Caxton."

"Well, after his manner. We shall be told, I fear, that it was our duty to seek out the place where these sheets of print are stored and search them."

"That means going to London. Always so crowded and noisy."

"It is even worse now than it was in 1451. But surely someone must keep a file of these news-sheets in Sleevelove."

"The priest?"

"Quite so; though the clerks in holy orders are not the only ones who can read in these days. Here is the church. His house probably adjoins."

"Let us go and search it."

"With pleasure. But we must wait till all are at rest. We should only make ourselves ridiculous if we were seen on modern premises."

* * * *

"The only part of Bishop's story that puzzles me," observed Mr. Cous ten, "is about the gesture the figure is supposed to have made."

"Yes, he put up his hands just as you do in church. I suppose you were not out last night, George, rehearsing your Christmas sermon?"

"You know quite well that I walked home with you immediately after evening service. About that gesture. It was, if it existed, a gesture of appeal or despair. Yes, a



'At that moment Bob had seen his face'

Image © Illustrated London News Group. Image created courtesy of THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD.



"Don't be a fool, Perry!
I'm not drunk. It was a
ghost"

man might throw up his hands in despair. Assuming that the figure was not a ghost . . .

"We know that there are no ghosts."

"Knowing that the figure was not a ghost, we are justified in guessing that the figure was that of a visitor, a stranger, shall I say, suddenly come upon the desolate scene where the Hall once stood."

"On Christmas Eve, at night, in the rain?"

"My dear, it is remotely possible. Supposing some member of the old family had only just heard of the horrible vandalism, and had hastened, in spite of the hour and the weather, to confirm the story with his own eyes."

"Very ingenious, George. Finding the Hall really gone, you think he would throw up his hands in despair."

"If he were an irreligious man he might be calling upon the Almighty to curse America and everybody who comes out to it."

"I don't see that America is to blame. We have hundreds of these fine old houses, and lots of them are unoccupied, just as was Sleevelove Hall. Along comes a rich American, and one can understand his surprise and disgust that we should so neglect such a beautiful property."

"I don't object to his buying or renting the house. It's the moving of it that annoys me."

"It is no sin to prefer your own country to others. Mr. and Mrs. Seamower offered a huge sum on condition that he might take the entire building to Ohio."

At this moment the wind got up suddenly. The two listening spectres were taken unawares, and were instantly blown out of the garden. When they touched ground again they were close to the coast. They entered a cavern and proceeded to talk over what they had heard.

"The Hall has gone to America," said Sir Francis.

"What is that?" asked Sir Godfery.
"America is a country out beyond the waters in the West. It was discovered in 1492."

"I have never met any of their dead."

"You know that when you are dead you meet only people of your own period. There were no Americans before 1492."

"It seems to me," observed Sir Godfery, "that I cannot be expected to haunt a house in a country which didn't exist in my time. But you, my dear great-grandson, are differently situated. It may be your duty to follow Sleevelove Hall to this America."

"A trifle specious, my dear great-grandfather. We are both condemned to haunt this house, and, as long as it

is haunted, its location, as the Americans say, makes no difference."

"You really think that I shall have to go to this America. I, at my age?"

"That won't do. There's only one hundred and thirty years between us. What's that in eternity?"

"But my dear Sir Francis, I'm a man of settled habits. I don't know the way to this America."

"Trust yourself to me. I will take you to America."

"To Ohio?"

"Undoubtedly."

"To Mr. and Mrs. Seamower?"

"To whom else?"

"Ohio! Seamower! The punishment is too great. Think, my dear great-grandson, Christmas Eve, when I do my haunting, is over, and you cannot reach this America now in time to hang yourself on Christmas night. Should we not return to eternity and perhaps make our way to this America for next year's hauntings?"

"It will not do. The rules of the Haunt Service are very definite on this point. If you are prevented from performing your haunt on the fixed date, you must perform it at the earliest possible opportunity."

* * * * *

Sleevelove Hall had been re-erected in a suburb of Cincinnati, and the ghosts on the morning of their arrival learnt from the conversation of Mr. and Mrs. Peregrine P. Seamower that it was intended to give it a house-warming that night on the occasion of the twenty-

(Continued on page 24)

first birthday of their daughter Cornelia. There was to be a grand fancy dress party, and all the guests had been asked to dress up "histeric."

Winter though it was, a good deal of Cornelia Seamower's birthday party took place out of doors. The night was dry and windless and the dancers frequently left the big refectory of Sleevelove Hall and patrolled the terrace. Mr. Seamower had not anticipated this, and the outside of the house was not illuminated. This was why, according to the heroes and heroines of many a petting party, so much of the party was held in the open air.

Inside, the old Hall was ablaze with light. Mr. Peregrine Seamower, one of whose peculiarities was a genuine dread of the dark, had made the decorators put electric bulbs everywhere.

The fun in the big refectory was at its height—that is to say, the dancers were bursting each other's air balloons in the most abandoned fashion—when a short fat man, dressed as a Georgian buck, ran into the refectory from the buttery, which opened on to the garden, cried out something unintelligible, and fainted in almost the centre of the dance-floor.

Most of the dancers stopped and crowded round the fallen figure. The jazz orchestra in the minstrel gallery, however, played madly on.

Someone picked up the head of the fallen man.

"Gee! it's Solly Mozleyheim."

"He's been lighting up in Perry's cellar."

"Solly never could carry his load."

"Hi, Perry. Come and look at Solly. Your bootlegger's killed him."

Mr. Seamower, garbed as Henry the Eighth, without beard but with horn rims, pushed through the crowd and came and stood over little Solly Mozleyheim. The fallen man had returned to consciousness and sat blinking up at his host.

"Solly," reprimanded Mr. Seamower, "didn't I lay down that no one was to get drunk at this party till the second day? This is an insult to my daughter."

"Don't be a fool, Perry! I'm not drunk. It was a ghost. Yes, a ghost! I've seen it. A real honest-to-goodness spectre!"

"Well, ghost is a new one on me.

You might have said lobster if you'd had one. Get up or let the boys and girls stamp over you."

"The others saw it. Corny fainted. Where's Corny?"

"My daughter!" Mr. Seamower glared round. "Where is she?"



Sir Francis Dampier looked down into the great refectory of his home."

Mr. Seamower was answered from the buttery door, through which a dozen people poured. All looked very white and ill-suited by their dashing historical costumes. Two of the men were carrying a Puritan maid, whom they deposited on a couch. Mr. Seamower rushed to her side.

"Corny! Corny! What's come to you? Get Mrs. Seamower, some of you, quick."

"She'll be all right in a minute, Mr. Seamower," explained a young doctor who had been one of those who carried the girl in. "Just a faint. And no wonder she did faint. I felt pretty like it myself."

"Doc, what's happened? Where've you been?"

"We were all on the terrace, smoking between dances."

"I took Corny out," explained a big, red-headed fellow. "She said she was hot."

"I get that. Certainly I get that. But don't tell me she's seen what Solly Mozleyheim says he's seen."

"She did see it. We all saw it."

"For the love of Mike, Doc, what?"

"A figure. A ghostly figure."

"A proper honest - to - goodness spectre," added Solly, who had fortified himself with brandy.

Mrs. Seamower now hurried from another room to her daughter's side, and almost at once Corny opened her eyes and shivered into her mother's arms.

"What d'ye make of this, Sarah? They all say they've seen a ghost."

"Sure, Mrs. Seamower, and it's not gone yet. It's in the house now."

There were screams from those women who had not left the refectory.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, someone stop that damned band . . . Paul!" Mr. Seamower shouted and the large, fat conductor turned round and put a hand to an ear. "Shut off! There's a panic."

The music stopped and the musicians gratefully lit cigarettes.

Mrs. Seamower, garbed as Mary Queen of Scots, stroked her daughter's hair. "Tell me, dear, tell me just what you saw."

"Oh, mother, it was a ghost! A ghost in a cloak. All misty but real—real as a movie."

"Where was it?"

"On the terrace. It came straight towards us."

"Did it speak?"

"No, mother. It kept mum as death. But it put up its hands, high up, and you could see its awful face."

"And what then?"

"Then I guess I went off."

"This is what happened then," explained the doctor. "The girls were fainting all round, and Solly was the only one of the boys to run."

"I ran to get help," explained Solly.

"The ghost—and I swear you couldn't call it anything else—walked to a doorway in the wall. The door was not opened, but the ghost went through it. It must be in the Hall now."

"Why, that door leads into the corridor they call the Beaufort corridor," said Mr. Seamower.

All the party now moved to the Beaufort corridor. It was brilliantly lit and empty.

"Are you afraid to turn out the lights in this corridor," asked the Doctor.

"Doc, what's the idea?"

"The ghost hasn't gone. You may think I'm mad, but I feel it is still about, still completing its haunt. Let me turn out the lights. Just for a moment, a moment."

Someone did as the doctor asked, and Mr. Seamower became very angry.

"Put that light on, durn you! Who's the boss of this joint, I'd like to know? Put that light on."

No one obeyed, for all were incapable of movement. At the end of the corridor there appeared a mistiness which took the shape of a cloaked man. It floated towards the terrified guests, and they saw that the face was infinitely unhappy.

When the ethereal figure reached the old oaken doorway, which Mr. Seamower knew was fixed so that it could not be opened, it passed out of sight, seemingly through the door. Mrs. Seamower fell heavily to the ground.

* * * * *

There was no more dancing at the Seamower party. Some of the guests went at once, but many stayed to talk, to wonder, and to keep the terrified Seamowers company. Mr. Seamower had already telephoned for rooms in the most modern hotel in Cincinnati. He had lost his passion for the historic.

The last of the company, numbering about fifty in all, sat round the big log fire on the great hearth of the refectory. The band had gone, the electric lights were all still blazing, and the fire was low. The time would be about five minutes to midnight. All were anxiously waiting to hear that sufficient automobiles had arrived to take them to the city.

"I wonder how often the spook does this haunt?"

"Once a year's the usual, Doc."

"You can't bet on that. It may be in the Hall still."

All turned on the doctor and scowled at him. He seemed to have some sort of sympathy with this beastly spoil-sport of a spook.

"I suppose you want the lights turned out again?"

"I shouldn't mind. I'm sure the poor thing is harmless. I'd like to try to speak to it."

"Cut out that Hamlet stuff," growled Mr. Seamower. "We're Americans and we don't want to

be led up the garden by anything British. Let it go home if it wants to be talked to."

A servant now announced that enough cars had arrived to take all into the city.

"I'd like to stay behind for a few moments," said the doctor, "just to look round this great room when it is dark."

"You'll go before I do, Doc. I reckon you think you recognise one of your old patients."

There was a slight ripple of laughter and then, suddenly, all the lights in the refectory went out. There was no light save the dull glow from the dying wood fire.

"Who the devil did that?" almost screamed Mr. Seamower. He jumped up and ran towards the door, behind which was the switchboard. He had just reached the door and opened it, when he was forced to look back into the refectory by a sharp cry from the doctor.

"Look . . . look! In the gallery. . . . It has come again."

This time no one fainted. All stood very still and became very cold.

In the dark minstrel gallery was a misty figure which by slow degrees became very clear and definite. It was the spectral figure of a man of middle height, somewhat stout and bloated, and wearing Elizabethan ruffle, doublet and hose. Not only a ghost, but a fresh kind of ghost!

Sir Francis Dampier looked down into the great refectory of his home. He stretched out his arms, as if in love, towards the earthly objects he was about to leave. He removed his ruffle. Those amongst the watchers who wore Elizabethan ruffles felt a horrible strangulation.

Next the ghostly figure was seen handling a rope. He made a noose

with one end and fastened the other to the gallery rail. He knelt with the noose round his neck, and bent his head in prayer.

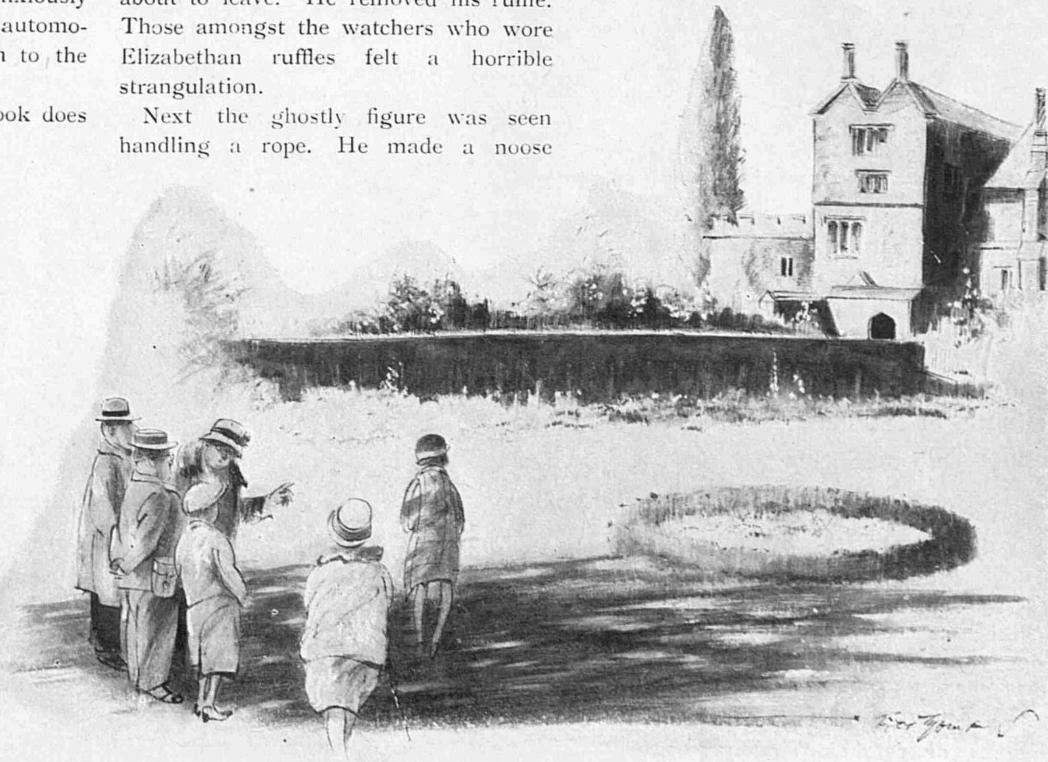
Now he rose and climbed on the railing. A moment's hesitation, and he leapt, leapt into the air. He did not fall to the ground. He dangled, writhing as he dangled. Then his ghostly body became limp, and he swayed slowly and more slowly like the pendulum of a clock that is running down.

No light came into the great refectory. The stricken watchers had their fill of the ghastly sight. Nearer and nearer they got to madness. But, when the least strong might have cracked, the spectral hanging began to fade from view. Empty blackness returned, and men and women were able to clutch each other and stagger to the door, where Mr. Seamower with purple face was laughing and gibbering.

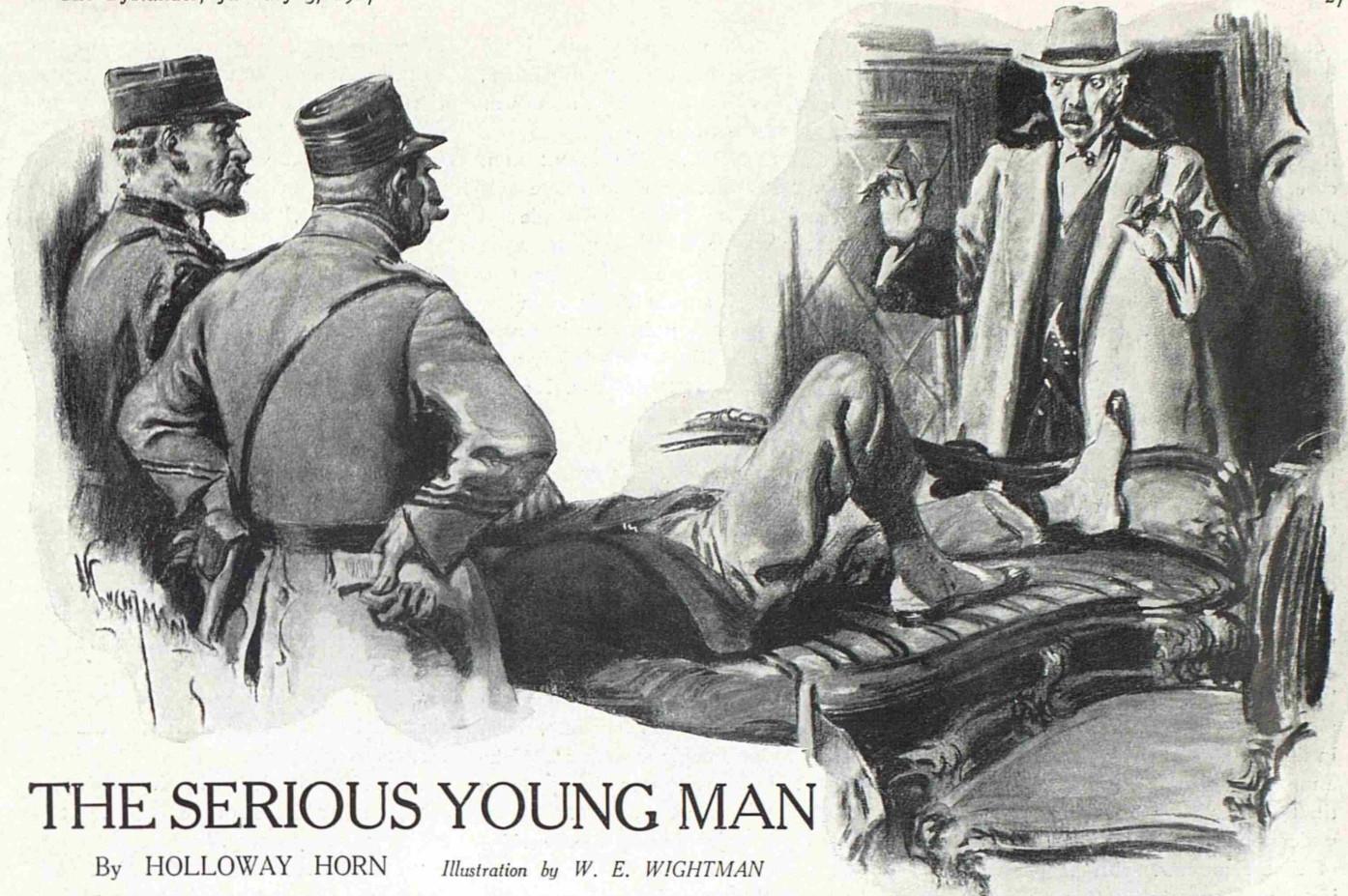
* * * * *

Sleevelove Hall is now back in Kent. Some English psychical research enthusiasts, thrilled by what they read in the American newspapers, bought the old place for a song and had it brought home. They still hope to see spirits, but the truth is that the house is no longer haunted. Sir Francis, on his return to eternity, was relieved of his painful annual task in recognition of his devotion to duty in following the house out of history into America, and Sir Godfrey was held to have earned retirement in virtue of his act of self-sacrifice in using the ethereal fire which composed his spectral right hand for the purpose of fusing Mr. Seamower's electric light.

B. M. H.



"Sleevelove Hall is no longer haunted"



THE SERIOUS YOUNG MAN

By HOLLOWAY HORN *Illustration by W. E. WIGHTMAN*

MR. BIRNBAUM's discreet establishment is in one of the best shopping streets in London. In his display cabinets you may find treasures, authentic or doubtful as the case may be, gathered from every "period" and every country. And you will usually find Mr. Birnbaum there.

Personally, I like him. If he tells you that, in his judgment, a certain jug is Liverpool, I am painfully aware that it by no means follows that it is Liverpool. Moreover, I will admit that it is not always his judgment I question at such times. But we are all, in our several ways, out to buy in the cheapest, and to sell in the dearest, markets, so why condemn Birnbaum?

I had called on him touching the matter of a miniature bought from him some time before for six guineas, a miniature which I had regarded as a "find" at the time I purchased it. I should, of course, have known Birnbaum better.

"I say, you know," I protested "that miniature isn't a Cosway."

"Oh?" He was unmistakably surprised. Indeed, he was the least bit too surprised.

"You said it was," I went on.

"In my judgment, I think I said," he corrected, in that gentle way of his. "If I could have proved that it was a Cosway, you would not have had it for six guineas. It was a speculative piece, as I told you. If, as you say, we were wrong, you must, I am afraid, regard it solely as a work of art."

Birnbaum's humour is nearly always ironic. It was impossible to be really angry with him, or to withstand for long his even-flowing phrases. We were, indeed, on quite good terms when the serious young man came into the shop. He was carrying both volumes of the "History of Spiritualism" under his arm.

"That ring in the window . . . is it Egyptian?" he asked, quietly. He was a well-dressed young man, and spoke with a delightful Kensington accent.

"It is Egyptian, sir . . . but it isn't exactly for sale. I mean, I am not anxious to sell it." This was strange hearing from Birnbaum, who would, under normal conditions, sell anything to anybody.

"The stone is a ruby?"

"I . . . I am not certain. It is a beautiful jewel," said Birnbaum. "Blood-red . . ."

"What are you asking for it?"

"I have already told you that I am not anxious to sell it. I had forgotten that it was in the window. I had intended to take it out."

"It came from the finger of a mummy, I suppose?" the serious young man went on.

"How did you know that?" asked Birnbaum, more startled than I have ever seen him before. He seemed to be watching his customer with a new interest, indeed, almost with suspicion.

"I didn't. I asked the question." Evidently a young man not easily

rattled. He was, however, rather too confident, I thought.

"Look here. What do you know about that ring?" demanded Birnbaum sharply.

"Nothing, I assure you. Nothing. I noticed it as I was passing, and imagined it was of Egyptian origin."

For perhaps thirty seconds there was silence. Then :

"If you care to hear it, I will tell you the story behind that ring," said Birnbaum gravely. "I do not say it is true. I do not particularly care. Do you, by any chance, know Silas Graatz?"

"No."

"He is a dealer in the Rue de la Paix. It was he who gave me the ring."

"He gave it to you?"

"That is what I said. It was originally on the finger of the left hand of Princess Amoru . . . the daughter of a Pharaoh of the third dynasty—I am not a student of these things myself, and tell you the story as it was told to me. You may remember that the Egyptian Government, some years ago, prohibited relics being taken out of the country?"

The serious young man nodded.

"They did not, however, prevent this getting out," Birnbaum continued. "The hand was smuggled out of Egypt, and on it . . . that ring. It came into the possession of my friend Graatz when he purchased the collection of a famous French Egyptologist."

"Graatz didn't like the hand. He is

not usually over-sensitive in these things, but there was a claw-like look about it. As a matter of fact, there is about most of these mummified hands, but I gather it was particularly noticeable in this case. Anyway, there was something about the hand that got on his nerves. He did not offer it for sale . . . and that, I can assure you, is unlike Graatz. Instead, he put it at the back of an escritoire . . . and forgot all about it. To one who knows Graatz as I do, that is very extraordinary.

"One day, he came upon it again, but apparently it no longer exerted quite the same sinister influence over him, for he took it out and put a little label on it marked a thousand francs—this, of course, was before the war. Two days later, the ring had disappeared."

"And the hand?" asked the young man.

"No . . . the hand was still where he had placed it. Someone had removed the ring, and damaged the hand in doing so. Naturally, Graatz was very annoyed. There had been several thefts in his shop just along then—you understand, of course, that in a shop of that character, with people wandering about examining this and that, it is very difficult to guard against theft.

"It is only a small shop, a very small shop, in spite of the fact that there are few establishments of its kind in the world so well known. Graatz usually had two assistants, but on the morning the ring was stolen, one of them was away ill, and Graatz was alone in the shop with the second, a man called Ducallier, a man who had been with him for some years . . . but I'm keeping you standing! Pray sit down."

Birnbaum placed a chair for the serious young man before he continued:

"It was Ducallier who drew the attention of M. Graatz to the theft. There had not been more than half a dozen people in the shop that morning, and most of them were known to Graatz. But in this business, one of the earliest things one learns is to cut one's losses. Graatz took the hand—since without the ring it was of little or no value—and put it away in a cupboard. Half an hour or so later, he went out to lunch.

"The affair had rather got on his nerves. The feeling that there was something sinister in the hand with its blood-red ring, came back to him with redoubled force."

"I can quite understand that," said the serious young man.

"In a way, I can, too," Birnbaum continued. "Although I'm not a particularly nervy individual, as my friend here will testify."

This was the first sign Birnbaum had given that he had not forgotten me.

"There's nothing wrong with your

nerve!" I said with emphasis, for I was still a little sore over the miniature, which in his judgment when he was selling it was a Cosway.

"And, therefore," he went on, blandly, "I cannot quite appreciate why my friend Graatz should have allowed an idea, a vague foreboding, to upset his lunch, which was what he did. Personally, if I am in Paris, I allow nothing to upset my lunch; it seems such a waste." Birnbaum smiled, and, judging from his soft contours, I could well believe him.

"However, I diverge," he went on. "After lunch, M. Graatz returned to the little shop in the Rue de la Paix to find the police in possession.

"Of course, no one wants the police in possession of one's shop, even in London. It is, however, a much more serious matter in Paris. Once they get in, goodness knows when they will go.

"But on this occasion, there was a certain excuse for their conduct, even for their interminable questions. The assistant, Ducallier, was lying on a Louis Quinze couch . . . dead."

"Dead?" ejaculated the serious young man.

"Dead!" repeated Birnbaum, and paused a moment before he continued: "You can imagine the horror of poor Graatz. He had left him an hour before, alive and well . . . and now, there he lay on a Louis Quinze couch . . . dead. Poor Graatz's nerves went to pieces. And this, more than anything, mystified the police. Curio dealers in the Rue de la Paix do not burst into tears, except under the stress of very great emotion. They questioned him and questioned him. The queer part was, that as far as he could tell, there was nothing missing from the shop.

"Syncope?" suggested the serious youth.

"No. It was not syncope. There were marks of fingers on his throat," replied Birnbaum so impressively that even I, the looker-on, was startled. "He had been strangled . . ."

"And there was nothing missing?" the serious youth asked. "There had been no robbery, no attempt at robbery?"

"There was nothing missing," Birnbaum repeated. Ultimately the police enquiries and investigations were completed and Graatz was left alone. But he was a broken man . . . his nerve had failed him. The hand . . . the sinister, evil influence of that hand settled on his spirit like a pall. He locked up the shop, and did not enter it again for several days. He would not have done so then, if the second assistant had not recovered from his indisposition and returned to work. But that morning he made an amazing, an unnerving discovery.

When he went to get the hand of the Princess Amoru, he discovered . . . that the ring was once again on her finger . . ."

"I say!" the voice of the serious young man was almost a whisper.

"That is all," said Birnbaum, simply. "But . . . what is the meaning of it . . . ?"

"I do not know. Nor do I care to enquire. In my judgment, sir, there are things better left alone, mysteries better unsolved."

"I do not agree with you. It is mere cowardice to avoid facing the truth. I could give you a theory which would cover the facts as you have stated them."

"With all respect, I do not desire to hear it," said Birnbaum, with a touch of dignity. "There are things which, in my judgment, we are not intended to understand, depths to which we are not meant to descend."

"I will give you the equivalent of a thousand francs for the ring," said the serious young man.

Birnbaum shook his head.

"I am not keen on selling it. It is a ring with a history."

"I will give you the equivalent of a thousand pre-war francs—forty pounds," the youth replied.

"Well . . ."—Birnbaum hesitated—"I have told you its story. Whatever happens, you cannot say I let you buy it in ignorance! Since you are so . . . so insistent, you may have it for forty pounds."

And presently the serious young man took it away with him.

"I suppose it was worth almost what he paid for it?" I asked, when he had gone.

Birnbaum made a gesture, gallic and complete.

"He is a wealthy young man," he said. "It was worth it to him."

"But it was a lovely ruby."

"Hardly. A garnet . . . I think," said Birnbaum, blandly.

"Then it wasn't worth ten!" I protested.

"Not to you or me," agreed Birnbaum. "But to him . . . yes."

"Anyway, it was quite an interesting story," I said.

"Quite," agreed Birnbaum. "I have heard Graatz use it to much greater effect, however, in that little shop in the Rue de la Paix. But even in my humble way, I suppose, in the last ten years I've sold a dozen garnet rings with its aid."

"That miniature you sold me didn't come from the Princess's tomb, by any chance?" I asked, with a pardonable touch of sarcasm.

"Oh, no," said Birnbaum, with a pleasant smile. "You wouldn't have had it for six guineas if it had!" H. H.

TERROR

By

DAPHNE DU MAURIER



Illustrations by

HOWARD K. ELCOCK

BRIDGET woke up with a start.

Somewhere something had fallen; perhaps a slate from the roof, or maybe it was only a door banging on the floor above. She did not know this, of course; at six years old it is difficult to reason about strange noises, or about anything that happens in the middle of the night. Half-past nine was the same as midnight to Bridget.

For a few minutes she lay awake wondering what it was that had woken her. She no longer felt

tired or sleepy, her mind was alert, and every nerve was on edge. Then she opened her eyes and looked around her. At first everything seemed black, pitch black, but as she became accustomed to the darkness the furniture in the bedroom gradually began to take shape.

A queer, ghastly shape.

This was not the same room as the one in which she had undressed. She saw that Nanny had not come up yet, because the bed was empty.

But, what is empty? The pillow must have slipped a little, for something bulky lay in the corner by the turned-down sheet. A piece of blanket had become untucked at the side; it was rolled slightly, and stretched across the centre of the bed. Yet it was not like an ordinary piece of blanket, this rolled object, it was an arm—a cold, white arm—with no body near it, with no person to whom it belonged.

A loose arm hanging from nowhere . . .

Bridget shrank back in her bed and turned her eyes away, but this time they fell on the wardrobe at the end of the room. It looked huge and sinister, far taller than in the daytime; it seemed to stretch as high as the ceiling.

And there was a dark, inky black corner just by the side of it.

She tried to think of what was kept in that corner, but she could not remember; surely it had never been there before?

Then something creaked.

Sweat broke out on Bridget's forehead, her heart thumped under her little white nightgown; her body burned, but her feet were icy cold!

There . . . another creak. . . . Again.

Her eyes were now glued to the wardrobe, whence the sound had come.

Slowly—very slowly—the door opened. The gap grew larger and larger, creaking with every inch; soon it would swing right open.

And what would be inside, waiting, waiting?

She dared not move now, because the slightest sound would tell them that she was there; if she kept quite still

with her eyes closed perhaps they would go away and forget all about her.

She lay silent, without a movement, and then, in spite of herself, the dread impulse came over her to look; her head turned, and her eyes were drawn, as if magnetised, towards the wardrobe.

The door was wide open.

And inside—inside where Nanny's clothes hung in the daytime, her coat, her mackintosh, her grey costume—were three shadowy figures, silent and mysterious.

Three mocking priests, with gaunt, dark bodies, and no faces.

Bridget knew they were watching her; they were waiting for her to move, when they would creep from their hiding-place, creep with soft, terrible steps towards her bed, and lift great white hands with thin, hollow fingers.

But the silent priests did not move, and she turned her head.

She waited, waited for some sound to warn her, some sign to tell her that they were coming to her—but nothing happened. This was worse, this sudden absence of any sound, this dead still quiet. She listened—she could hear Silence.

A faint humming sound in her ears, then gradually it buzzed louder, until it became a roar like a mighty wind. She opened her eyes again, and saw that the square dressing-table had turned into a square, hunchbacked animal, with thin, queer-shaped legs.

It stood beneath the window ready to pounce. The cord of the blind was rattling against the window pane—someone was trying to get into the room.

Yes, at either side of the window, where the curtains generally hung, there were two evil women with long black hair. These were more frightening than the priests; these were witches with claws instead of hands; they had the same faces as a woman in a book she had once seen. She remembered the book, a large old book with a brown cover, and the pictures were horrible.

Supposing all the pictures had become alive, and were going to steal one after the other through the window!

Bridget swallowed—the sound of it seemed to echo through the room, but she could not help herself, she had to swallow again. Her throat was dry—she tasted dust. Everything in the room now took a special shape. The fireplace was a yawning cave; the table a gigantic toad; the chairs were stunted dwarfs.

If only Nanny would come up; if only she could get out of this terrible room into the kind, warm Day Nursery, flooded with electric light.

What if snakes came down the chimney—long, black,





*'The fireplace was a yawning cave;
the table a gigantic toad'*

wriggling snakes—and glided along the floor
and coiled themselves round the bedposts?

The floor became thick with bodies of dead cats
—she had seen one in a gutter once—grey, furry
cats; and mice, thousands of headless mice . . .

Bridget began to cry, and the sound of her crying
frightened her.

The Things had heard; they were all coming near her.
The priests bowed, the witches waved, the animals crept
quietly, quietly . . .

The air suddenly became thick with stifling blankets; she
was going to be suffocated, the ceiling was sinking down
upon her. With a strangled scream Bridget climbed out of
bed, she stumbled across the floor and flung herself panting
against the door. "Nanny, Nanny, come quickly!"

They were all coming nearer her, long, distorted shapes
grinned at her, large crooked hands thrust themselves for-
ward to grasp her.

Above her hung great gaping mouths.

Her feet stood in a pool of blood . . . She was lying
on the floor now, screaming into the carpet.

Then the door opened, and someone turned on the light.

It was Nanny. Bridget flung herself upon her, sobbing
hysterically.

"Nanny, Nanny, take me away; don't let them get at
me; I'm so frightened, don't go away! Oh! save me!"

The nurse shook her crossly. She was irritated at having

to come upstairs from her cup of cocoa in the kitchen, but
Bridget's screams had alarmed her and she was afraid there
might be a fire.

"What do you mean by making all that noise?" she said
sharply. "You ought to be fast asleep hours ago instead of
shouting and screaming. I should be ashamed if I were you.
I won't have any nonsense, do you hear me?"

Bridget's screams rose higher and higher; she begged and
pleaded to be taken downstairs; she clutched on to the
nurse with clammy, wet fingers; she grovelled on the floor;
she almost licked her hand.

"You stop where you are; do you understand?"

Bridget was picked up and thrust back in her bed.

"Will you be quiet at once?"

Nurse was gone in an instant, and the light was put out.

The door closed behind her, and there was a sound of
retreating footsteps.

For a moment the child was too amazed to think. Then
came realisation—she was alone.

Long shadows crept across the floor . . .